AN ICELANDIC ROMANCE.

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KORMAK,

AN ICELANDIC ROMANCE

OF THE

TENTH CENTURY.

IN SIX CANTOS.

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PREFACE.

During the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, and later, the Scandinavians — rude, barbarous, and uncultivated, ſtill adhering to their old religion of wild, romantic, and legendary ſuperſtition, or rude converts of Chriſtianity, relinquiſhing old rites to graſp, with barbarian energy, the ſuperficial principles of a new faith, that at firſt ſoftened not their fierceneſs — were the active ruling-ſpirits of the world. From their homes in the primeval foreſts of the North, this nomadic people overran the lands of the more civilized but weaker

nations, then ſunk in enervating luxury from that ancient vigor, that made the matchleſs force of Roman arms, the glittering ſplendor of Grecian enlightenment.

They deſcended in countleſs hordes from their wild faſtneſſes of the North, bringing diſmay and deſtruction upon populous cities and wealthy, luxuriant lands. With a claſh like the ruſh of a mountain torrent, the bands of the "yellow-haired Northmen" — the ſtrong of limb, the dauntleſs and ruthleſs of heart — ſwept all before them in their reſiſtleſs march, and returned to their homes laden with a wealth they knew not how to uſe, and clothed with ſavage terrors, more potent than even their ſavage arms, to break down the feeble reſiſtance of their weaker, though more civilized, ſouthern neighbors. Over all the ſeas ſwept the

armed ſhips of the Northmen, bound on miſſions of piracy and rapine; no ſhore, however remote, was ſafe from their attacks, that had aught to tempt their cupidity or love of martial deeds. Even into the wild Northern Ocean they puſhed their adventurous voyages,—diſcovered and colonized the far-away iſland of Iceland; and here, with characteriſtic energy, in a climate that had ſo little to recommend it as the habitation of man, they eſtabliſhed a republic, that for more than four hundred years flouriſhed in its iſolated liberty, and effectually reſiſted the many efforts of Norwegian princes to bring the iſland under their deſpotic rule.

The hiſtory of this little Northern republic is full of wild and ſtrange romance, and from its Sagas, wonderfully preſerved, might be found material ſufficient to em-

ploy even the myriad romance-writers of this nineteenth century, without the fear of ſoon exhauſting the ſupply.

From ſome of theſe old ſtories has been haſtily and crudely conſtructed the following tale, that, aiming not at literary excellence, only propoſes to intereſt, perhaps, a leiſure hour, and call attention to this much-neglected field of romance. If this ſhall be accompliſhed, the author will be repaid for thus venturing unannounced before the public.

THE AUTHOR.

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Kormak.

CANTO I.

OGMUND.

CANTO I.

OGMUND.

NORTHMEN of old! 't was ye awoke the world
From its lethargic ſlumber, — broke the reſt
Of ſlumbering centuries, — when from forth
Your own rough Northern home ye poured the flood
Of a wild enterpriſe, — an energy,
A will to do, — a wild and reckleſs will,
That ſwept like ſtorm-wind o'er the ſtartled world.

Northmen of old! 't was ye awoke the world
With your ſhrill trumpet-notes; and where ye came,
Your own ſtrong ſpirit filled the hearts of men:
They ſaw you landing, armed, upon their ſhores,
From your light barges, with their brazen beaks:
Wild warriors of the North, they knew your fame,

And, leaping up from velvet couches, fled
From the wild torrent of your mountain ſpears.
The element of action, kindling up
The heart, firing the brain, and making life
Leap, with the life-blood, through the boiling veins:
This wild, undaunted energy of ſoul
Bade ye, barbarian dwellers of the North!
Go forth, the pioneers whoſe work ſhould be
To kindle up, regenerate the world.
Your ſluggiſh neighbors of the lazy South
Caught inſpiration from ye, as the garb
Of wealth and luxury, that made them weak,
Was rudely torn from off their trembling forms
By thoſe who knew nor luxury nor fear.

Northmen of old! though wild and rude ye were,
Ye taught the feeble learning of the South
A uſeful leſſon, that their wiſeſt ſage,
Poring o'er volumes, wondrous-written tomes,
Had never dreamed of in his wiſeſt hour:
Your claſh of ſteel proclaimed a mighty truth;
And Northern ſwords ſpoke wiſer than the pen.

A cloud of romance hangs around old names.
The hero decks the ſavage of the North:
There is a charm in wild and reckleſs deeds,

A thrilling ſympathy with dauntleſs hearts;
And gentle minds, while dwelling on the theme
Of the wild deeds of rapine and of war,
Still feel a kindly intereſt in thoſe
Old hero-pirates of the early North.

Alone, in icy ſeas that gird it round,
A wintry belt, o'er which down from the pole
The frozen blaſt comes, claſhing like a knight
Clad in a cryſtal armor, war waging
'Gainst its lone, defenceleſs ſhore, is Iceland.
Here, in old time, the rovers of the North
Planted their dwellings; here, of old, they built
A rude republic: crude and rough indeed
As the wild beings, tribute of the ſea,
Thrown like the ſea-foam, gathered from afar,
Roughly upon the ſhore. The wild ſea-king,
Steered by his raven compaſs to the iſle,
Soon learned to call it home; and from that home,
His ice-bound fortreſs, ſhadowed by the North,
He turned adventurous beaks; home again,
Wearied in conteſt both with man and ſea,
Sailed his ſtorm-beaten barks; when the white peaks
Of Iceland's mountains glittered o'er the ſea,
Their frozen ſilence ſpoke to him of home:
And ſmiled pale welcome to their daring ſon, —
Their warlike ſon, born of an ocean ſire.

Flying from the oppreſſion of his king,
From the fierce and iron rule of Harald,
The ſtern tyrant of old warlike Norway,
Ogmund embarked his fortunes on the ſea, —
His children and poſſeſſions, — and ſailed forth
To ſeek thoſe lands that in the far Northweſt
Had been discovered, that haply he might live
Free from the yoke that galled his lion ſpirit;
Willing to brave the dangers of new lands, —
Thoſe vague, myſterious dangers, that hung
Like demon ſpirits round the realms afar,
Frighting the ſouls of ſuch as knew of fear,
But not the ſoul of Ogmund: a brave heart
Was his inheritance from warlike ſires;
And not the perils of a ſtormy ſea,
Nor the rough wildneſs of a northern clime,
Where Ice and Winter rule the realm ſupreme,
And ſcarcely yield to Summer's milder ſway, —
Could daunt the Northman's heart, — a heart inured
To war and danger from his days of youth.

Ogmund embarked for Iceland; and at length,
After much danger on the ſtormy ſea,
He reached that iſland; landed there his freight,
Himſelf, his children, and his houſehold goods;
Pitched on a ſpot where he might build his houſe,
And took poſſeſſion of the lands around,

Somewhat regardleſs of the prior claims
Of thoſe firſt ſettlers, who ſuppoſed that they
Had better rights than the laſt comer had.
But when the warlike Ogmund fought, and ſlew
A half a ſcore of them, with a great ſword,
An heirloom of his race, tall as himſelf,
And quite as little poliſhed as its owner,
The firſt poſſeſſors found that he had rights
They had not at the firſt perceived, and ſo
Left him to the enjoyment of their lands,
Rather than meet his heavy argument,
Which always ſilenced them.

But reſtleſs ſtill,
Ogmund would ſometimes take a cruiſe at ſea,
And meeting other roving, warlike ſhips,
Would ſtill indulge an old propenſity, —
And ſailing out with one ſhip, would return
Sometimes with two. And thus his name became
Well known and famous. He grew in riches, —
A wealth of Iceland fields and herds and flocks.
And when at laſt he died, advanced in years, —
Died quietly in his manſion, by the ſea,
On which ſo oft he perilled his wild life, —
He left behind a heritage of fame;
And, what perhaps they valued more, riches
And ſhips and large eſtates, to his two ſons.

Kormak and Thorgils were the ſons of Ogmund;
Kormak the elder, and inherited
The larger part of all the large eſtates
Their warlike father had bequeathed to them,
With all that father's ſoul of reckleſs daring,
And reſtleſſneſs, though ſoftened and adorned
By many graces, both of mind and perſon.
He was a ſkilful ſcald, framing his verſes
Sometimes relation of his father's deeds,
Though oftener telling of the beauty,
The countleſs charms, of ſome Icelandic fair;
And often, too, the youthful ſcald would wage
A war of ſtrophes with his poet friends:
His father vanquiſhed neighbors with the ſword;
Kormak o'ercame them in the war of words.
Yet was he not unmindful of the gift, —
The laſt great gift his dying father gave, —
The huge two-handed ſword, with this advice:
"If you would win reſpect from men, my ſon,
Learn to uſe this; 't will settle all debate,
Will make you honored, famous, wealthy, great;
And be thy mark of rightful lineage too
From me, who in my youth received this blade
From my brave ſire, my only heritage."
And Kormak learned to uſe the famous ſword:
And there were none, of all the youths around,
Who could compete with him and his great ſword.

A handſome youth was Kormak, tall and ſtrong,
As ſtraight and firm as ſtands the Norway pine
In the old land from which his father came.
His raven hair hung round a dauntleſs brow,
And eyes that challenged all who met their gaze;
Yet had their kindling glances generous warmth
When ſofter feelings moved him. He was loved
Of many friends, and firſt of theſe was Thorgils,
His younger brother; for between the two,
Although diſſimilar, was a ſtrong love,
So great that their two hearts ſeemed only one;
And it became a ſaying in the land,
When they would picture friendſhip ſtrongly:
"Closely knit in kindred love as Kormak
And his brother Thorgils." Yet all unlike
Were they in mind and perſon; for Thorgils
Was as gentle as his brother fiery:
A ſlender boy, with golden hair, and eyes
Of feminine ſoftneſs; a voice as ſweet
As a young girl's; a winning gentleneſs
Had he, that ſeized upon the heart, and there
Enſhrined itſelf, as though there was its home.
Yet did he not lack manhood, for he was
Born of a race that knew not how to fear.
Companion with his brother at all times,
In all adventures, both by land and ſea;
For they inherited their father's love
Of ſeamanſhip, and were as much at home

Upon the deck of their ſwift-ſailing bark
As when they rode or clambered o'er the hills
Of their wild, icy, northern mountain home.

"Brother," ſaid Kormak, as one eve they ſat
Together near the fire in the great hall,
"I have a tale to tell you: Thou doſt know
Three days ago I galloped o'er the hills,
To ſee how fared our herdsmen in the west.
The ſky was clear; but ere the cloſe of day
The ſky was blackened with the heavy clouds,
That ſtill grew darker, and obſcured the ſun.
I knew a ſtorm was hanging in thoſe clouds:
The air was ſtill and heavy, and no breath
Of wind was ſtirring, as I croſſed the hills
On my way homeward. Raven flew along,
And promiſed with his ſpeed to bring me home
Ere the wild war of elements began.
As I came near to Gnupsdale, daſhing on
With reckleſs ſpeed, quick came a flaſh of light,
That almoſt blinded me, and with that flaſh
Came the loud craſh of thunder, its wild roar
Burſting low down, almoſt upon my head.
Raven ſprung wildly, madly, in the air,
And then, bewildered, stopped, and, ſnorting, reared,
As though he battled with the ſtorm above;
Another inſtant, and a ſecond craſh

Burſt on our ears; the glaring ſheet of flame,
The deaf'ning roar that mingled with the glare,
Maddened the frighted ſteed, and blinded him;
Backward he fell, as though the bolt had ſtruck,
And horſe and rider rolled upon the ground.
And now the wind came roaring, ſweeping paſt,
As though that craſh had looſed its brazen gates;
And floods of rain came, like a deluge, down,
Daſhed in wild torrents on the trembling earth.
I gained my feet, and raiſed my frightened ſteed,
Whoſe quivering limbs, and drooping neck, and eye
With fear dilated, told his ſoul was tamed
By the wild terrors of the elements,
Looſed from the laws that bind their fearful ſtrength.

"I ſought the ſhelter of the neareſt roof.
Gnupsdale was near; I could not chooſe but ſeek
E'en that protection from the raging ſtorm.
I knew its owner was our father's foe,
But deemed him kinder than the foe without.
My horſe was houſed, and I beſide the fire
Sat down, to dry my garments ſoaked with rain.
The fire burned brightly and my hoſts were kind,
And ſoon I thought not of the ſtorm without.
Gnupsdale, you know, is an eſtate of Thorkell,
But he reſides at Tunga: this I knew,

And, knowing it, I thought to meet alone
Dependents, or perchance his kinſmen, there.
But while I ſat beſide the blazing fire
There came a fair-haired lady to my ſide,
And bade me welcome to her father's hall, —
Bade me forget the ſtorm that drove me there,
And gently offered reſt and kindly cheer.
I ſtammered thanks, — I knew not what I ſaid;
So fair a maiden I had never ſeen:
Her eyes were gentle, and her golden hair
Shone like a halo round her beauteous face.
She aſked me if my fall had done me harm:
As in a dream, I vaguely anſwered, No; —
And other things ſhe kindly, gently ſaid;
And bidding me once more a welcome kind,
Withdrew, and left me ſtill as in a dream.

"The ſtorm was o'er. I ſought my horſe again,
And galloped homeward, through the dark'ning night;
But ſtill before me was that lovely face:
I ſaw naught elſe, and ſince that hour have known
No thought but of her beauty and her grace.
I could not reſt, and ſo again to-day
To Gnupsdale went, to proffer her my thanks
For the ſafe ſhelter, and her greeting kind.
They coldly ſaid, at morn that ſhe had gone

With her ſire, Thorkell, and a numerous train,
Her brothers and her kinſmen, back to Tunga.

"Brother, it may be weakneſs, but I feel
A new emotion kindling in my heart:
I feel a reſtleſſneſs, a ſtrange deſire
To look again upon that beauteous face,
To hear that gentle voice, and meet again
The kindly glances of her heavenly eyes.
Is this not love? You oft have heard me ſay
How vain and fooliſh are a lover's ſighs, —
That my free heart ſhould never bend, and ſue
For love or favors at a woman's feet.
Nay, do not ſmile: my heart is ſurely won;
And man muſt yield to the decrees of fate."

And Thorgils, muſing ſilently awhile,
Thus anſwered him: "Kormak, liſten to me;
And though the tale I tell be one
That you have often heard, yet it is one
That it is well you now ſhould think upon.
When firſt our father ſought this iſland ſhore,
Thorkell dwelt here, upon the very ſpot
Where now we dwell; our father ſettled near,
But ſoon diſputes aroſe between the two.
Our father, Kormak, was a daring man,
Taught in the ſchool of action and of war:
He ever held the rule, that 'might is right,'

And made men yield before his iron will.
Thorkell was proud, and would not yield his lands,
His place, his power, unto a ſtranger's hand;
And ſo a mutual feud aroſe, and oft
From angry words they came to angry blows.

"Our father made a voyage to Norway once,
And, driven by a wild and fearful ſtorm,
His ſhip was wrecked amid the Orkney Iſles.
The news came home to Iceland that his ſhip
Was wrecked at ſea, and all on board were loſt.
Then Thorkell, thinking that his ſtubborn foe
Could never come to trouble him again,
Summoned his friends around him, and rode forth
To wreak his vengeance on our father's friends.
They burned our houſe; they ſlew our faithful friends;
They ſeized our goods; drove off our flocks and herds.
A truſty ſervant fled with you and me,
And placed us ſafe beyond fierce Thorkell's rage.
He thought we died within our blazing houſe,
And, grimly muttering, 'Thus my foes I cruſh,'
Turned joyful homeward, thinking Ogmund's race
Could never ſtand before his path again.

"A year paſſed on: one morning in the bay
Anchored two ſhips. Our father had returned.
What words can paint the rage that filled his
breaſt,
When he beheld the ruins of his home!
Quickly he landed with his armed force,
And, learning who had dared to do this deed,
He led his followers ſwiftly here to Mél.

"Thorkell, when he beheld our father's flag
Floating upon the maſts of either ſhip,
Summoned his friends and ſervants all in haſte;
For now he ſaw the dead returned to life, —
The ſea had yielded up her daring ſon:
His ancient foe had come in arms and ſtrength
To pay his vengeance for a deadly wrong.

"Here, on the ſlope before this houſe of Mel,
They met and fought. It was a deadly ſtrife:
Our father fought, avenging his deep wrongs;
And Thorkell fought for ſafety, for his life.
The chieftains met; and each defiance hurled
Back on the other, as they madly ruſhed,
And claſhed their blades together. Our father
Was famed the boldeſt ſoldier of his time;
And Thorkell, too, was known for ſtrength and
ſkill,
And a bold heart, that never quailed to fear.

Our father, though his ſhield was cleft in twain,
And his proud creſt was ſhorn of floating plume,
Cut Thorkell downward, with a ſweeping blow
That ſtretched the warrior, bleeding, on the earth.
His friends were ſcattered, ſlain, or wounded ſore;
But one true friend his maſter's body begged,
And, Ogmund granting, bore it from the field.

"Then Ogmund took poſſeſſion of the lands
And the eſtates of Thorkell, save Gnupsdale,
Which he gave to Thorkell's ſons. Here they bore
Their wounded father, as they thought, to die;
But Thorkell's wound at length in time was cured:
He journeyed northward, and ſoon gained new lands, —
Larger eſtates than thoſe that he had loſt, —
By a rich marriage with the only child
Of old Bajarni, famed for wealth and lands, —
The richeſt man who dwelt upon our iſland.

"This is the feud between our houſe and hers:
She you have ſeen at Gnupsdale is daughter
To Thorkell, whom of old our father fought.
Steingerda may be gentle, but her friends,
Her father, brothers, kinſmen, all her houſe,
Still hate our father, even in his grave:
They ſtill hate us, his ſons, heirs of that wealth

Which once was theirs, but which our father took, —
A rightful vengeance for the wrongs he bore.
You muſt indeed poſſeſs a valiant heart
(As well I know you do) even to hope
For love or favor from this hoſtile race,
Sprung from our father's ancient deadly foe.
Steingerda knew you not for Ogmund's ſon,
Or elſe, perchance, her greeting then had lacked
The cordial welcome that ſhe gave to you:
When ſhe ſhall know you as your father's ſon,
Her eyes will loſe their gentle, kindly glance,
And in its place will come the ſtony look
We ſaw in Thorkell, when we met at End,
And when that chieftain knew us at a glance
For ſons of Ogmund, and looked death at us.
Baniſh the thought, my brother, from your breaſt
Of loving her, from whom but hate is due;
So ſhall you win repoſe of mind and heart;
So ſhall you ſhun regrets that come too late."

"All this, dear Thorgils, has my own mind ſaid:
Thus has it counselled; yet, in ſpite of all
That reaſon, judgment, or your love adviſe,
I feel a reſtleſs, wild deſire to ſeek
This maiden, even in her father's hall, —
To daſh aſide obſtructions that ariſe,
And prove a love that nothing can withſtand, —

A courage that ſhall bend e'en fate itſelf,
Compelling deſtiny to yield to me.
Say not that this is madneſs: there's a charm
In very reckleſſneſs that ſtill allures,
And conquers judgment in the daring heart.
Do not adviſe me more: to-morrow morn
Alone I go, diſguiſed as wandering minſtrel,
To ſeek Steingerda, — to brave her father, —
And follow this adventure to the end."

"That ſhall you not!" Thorgils in haſte replied;
"Think you ſo meanly of my father's ſon,
That he will lazily repoſe him here?
Think you ſo poorly, brother, of my love?
I go with you! come weal, come woe, come death,
There is my place, brother, beſide you ſtill."

"Nay, Thorgils, I would rather go alone;
But if you muſt, I will not ſay you nay:
We'll ſhow old Thorkell that a ſavage look
Has not the power to awe brave Ogmund's ſons;
We'll ſhow that chief that enterpriſe ſtill lives,
And courage died not in our father's ſtock
When Ogmund died. We owe it to our name
To ſhow the world our father's ſons are we.
Yet I am plunging you in dangers, Thorgils,
Fooliſhly, vainly, — you I ſhould protect:

My younger brother, whom our father gave
Into my charge when his protection failed,
And bade me keep you with my ſtronger arm
From every danger. No! you must not go;
Alone, I ſhall not know what 'tis to fear,
But you with me, my heart would fear for you,
And coward paleneſs blanch my manly cheek."

But Thorgils, too, could be reſolved and firm,
For no perſuaſion could induce him ſtay;
And ſo it was reſolved that they ſhould go
Diſguiſed to Tunga, there to act as chance
And time ſhould offer, or events compel.

Kormak.

CANTO II.

THE MINSTREL.

CANTO II.

THE MINSTREL.

CIRCLES the year! and when the ſinking ſun
Shines cold and diſtant on the freezing earth:
When Winter comes, clad in an icy garb,
Still hurried on by winds that wildly roar:
When the broad fields, ſo lately green and glad,
Blighted beneath the ſeaſon's froſty touch,
Wrap ſilent round them their white robe of ſnow,
And, deſolate and dreary, wait for Spring;
When the dark foreſt ſheds its leafy coat,
And the ſtript branches, dreary ſkeletons,
Stand ſpectre-like, or wave in diſmal gloom,
Creaking and moaning in the icy wind;
When the houſed products of the fruitful year
Promiſe ſecurity from cold and want,
And crackling fires blaze brightly on the hearth,
And kindly friends are cluſtered round the board;

We welcome Chriſtmas! as an old, dear friend,
We give it ſmiling welcome. What though Time
Has ſwept away another year of life!
How many bleſſings with the days have come!
How many mercies, comforts, joys, and hopes!
A year has paſſed ſince Chriſtmas laſt was here:
A year full crowded with events and acts,
With thoughts and memories, once awakened,
That never more can ſleep. The thoughtful mind
Finds food for contemplation, as ariſe
The varied pictures of the cloſing year;
Unwritten hiſtories come crowding faſt,
And forms and faces that have paſſed away
Are mingled with them in the dreamy thought.
The ſacred influence of the holy birth
Awakes the reverent feelings of the heart;
But Memory, ſtartled in the dreaming brain
By merry laugh and ſmiling friends around,
Forgets to think upon the ſilent paſt,
Under the noiſy influence of the hour.

Back from the preſent to the days of old!
From our blithe Chriſtmas to the feaſt of Jul!
From the religion of the lowly born
To the dark age when Odin's worſhip was!
In Tunga's halls, upon the Mother-night,
They feaſted joyous, and the ample board
Groaned 'neath the weight of rich and generous cheer.

Aſſembled here were friends and kinſmen; all
Who claimed relation with old Thorkell's houſe
Came here this night to hold the annual feaſt,
And waſte the hours until the morning's dawn
With feſtal revelry, with waſſail, ſong and wine.

The banquet-hall, though rough and rudely built,
Was large and lofty, and the arching roof
Of rough-hewn timber ſpanned full forty feet,
While twice that ſpace meaſured its utmoſt length.
In brazen ſockets fixed along the wall
On either ſide a ſcore of torches blazed,
Throwing a bright but flickering light around,
While gleamed their light on ſhield and ſword and ſpear,
Hung in profuſion on the lofty wall.
Beneath, along an oaken table ranged,
Sat the wild feaſters of this night of Jul:
The drinking-horns from hand to hand paſſed round,
Oft filled from the huge flagons on the board.

A platform, raiſed two ſteps above the floor,
Stretched from one end a ſpace of thirty feet,
And here with tapeſtry the walls were hung,
And richer garniſhed with their warlike gear:
Rich ſuits of mail, and ſwords inlaid with gold,

And axes, on whoſe poliſhed helves ſhowed white
The luſtrous gleaming of bright ſilver rings;
Banners, the trophies of the well-fought field;
And in the centre, from a brazen beak,
Captured in ſome wild battle on the ſea,
Hung a rich canopy, beneath which sat
In regal ſtate the maſter of the feaſt.
A tall old man was Thorkell, ſilver-haired,
And bent with age; but ſtill within his eye
Shone the proud glance that age can never tame.
He wore a robe of velvet, richly wrought;
And, ſpite of age, the chieftain's look was bold,
As well beſeemed his ſtate, — a feudal prince.
On Thorkell's left hand ſat his youthful dame,
Through whom his rich eſtates had come to him,
And Steingerda, his daughter, famed for beauty,
The faireſt maiden of that northern iſland;
And other ladies, friends and kindred, graced
With their fair preſence and bright ſmiles the board.
Upon the right the ſons of Thorkell ſat,
Loptur and Alf; the kinſmen of the houſe
Were ranged beyond, while on the lower floor
Sat the retainers, the well-tried ſoldiers,
Captains of veſſels, petty officers,
Cloſe ſeated all around the feſtal board.
In rich, half-warlike, holiday attire,
They came to revel at their chieftain's feaſt.

The Saxon face, the flaſhing Norman eye,
Spoke the wild, daring heart that filled each
breaſt.

Behind the chair of Thorkell Narfi ſtood,
His chiefeſt councillor, though ſtill a youth.
Full of quips and witty ſayings was he,
Yet ſhrewd withal, adviſing prudently
To his too fiery and impetuous maſter,
Who gave to him alone the liberty
To curb his anger, or reſtrain his rage; —
A ſlender youth, with ſmall and ſparkling eyes,
A keen, quick look of ſatire and of craft,
Maſked with a ſmile, — an ever-ready ſmile,
That lighted up his pale, but handſome face;
So gayly dreſt, he blazed with gold and gems.
Ever beſide his maſter was he found,
Filling the golden cup that Thorkell held,
But ſeldom drinking of the wine he poured;
With eaſy grace on Thorkell's ſhoulder leaned,
Whiſpered and chatted gayly in his ear,
Launching ſome bolt of wit, that hit the mark,
And won the applauſe of merriment around.

Now from the outer door a butler came,
To aſk his maſter if an aged minſtrel,
Who craved admittance there, might be allowed
To ſing a ballad of a former age,

And, with his little ſkill, do all the grace
Within his art to the high feſtival.
An old man, with long locks of ſilver hair
His tall form bent, a trembling ſtep of age,
His right hand leaning on a fair-haired boy,
The other reſting on an oaken ſtaff,
The minſtrel entered. But ere yet he reached
One half the diſtance to the upper hall,
Two viſitors arrived, who came in haſte,
And, preſſing paſt the old man, quickly ſtood
By Thorkell's ſide, who greeted them with joy,
And eagerly received the news they bore.
Theſe were two brothers, Oddur and Gudmund,
Sons of Thorveiga, whoſe wild ſorceries
And oracles had given to her the fame
Of mind familiar with the *evil god*,
And power, through him, to propheſy what time
Had ſhrouded darkly in a future age;
And theſe, reputed as her ſons, who dwelt
With her in her ſecluded hut, — her ſtrange,
Wild ſervitors, — were men of giant forms,
Rude in their manners, clumſy in their gait,
Ill-looking faces, where deceit and fraud
Mingled with coarſeneſs and ſtupidity;
Great brutes they were, ſo huge and ſtrong,
And ſullen in their looks, that a ſhudder —
Not fear, but loathing — paſſed around the hall.
Thorkell bade Narfi find them each a place;

Then, riſing, thus addreſſed his gueſts, who ceaſed
Awhile their revelry, and liſtened as
The old man ſpoke, with earneſt voice, and eye
That flaſhed in fierceneſs when his paſſions woke.

"I need not tell to you, my friends, the wrongs
I bore from Ogmund; theſe you know too well.
The robber now is dead, and unavenged
Are all the injuries he did to me.
The wealth he took his ſons inherited,
And now enjoy. I ſwore a ſacred oath
To wreak my vengeance dearly on the fire;
He has eſcaped me, but the ſons remain.
And now I ſwear, by Thor, and Odin too,
Here, on this ſacred, honored Mother-night,
To ſweep the race of Ogmund from the earth,—
To ſhed each drop of blood that now doth flow,
Kindred to him, in any heart that beats
On this our iſland. You, my friends, I truſt
To give me aid of arms and valiant hearts.
The ſons of Ogmund boast of many friends,
And Kormak ſeeks to win a fame for arms
And daring deeds; but you ſhall ſcatter them
Like driving foam before the ocean wind,
And boaſtful Kormak ſhall go ſeek his ſire,—
Shall bear my vengeance paſt the ſilent gate
To that dead foe; not even death ſhall ſave
From my fierce vengeance, nurſed through many
years,

That thus at laſt in blood it may be drowned.
Thorveiga, who did never ſpeak in vain,
Communing with the gods, bids me go on,
And victory ſhall crown our undertaking.
Give me your anſwer! ſhall I have your aid,
Freely and boldly, in this juſt empriſe?
Or do you fear young Kormak's boaſted ſword?"

And now aroſe a wild, tumultuous din;
Swords were claſhed, and cries of "Death to Kormak!"
Shook e'en the maſſive timbers of the hall,—
Made the red torches flicker their wild light,
And ruſtled ſwords and axes on the wall.
A wild, fierce joy ſprung up in Thorkell's eye;
Already he beheld his proſtrate foes,
And drank the deep, the long-delayed revenge.
When now the ſilence was at length reſtored,
He thanked his wild retainers for their zeal,
And promiſed ſoon to bring them to the deed.

Meantime the aged minſtrel and the boy,
His harp-bearer, had reſted on the bench
That ſtood againſt the wall; ſilent they ſat,
Yet once their eyes had met, and then there glanced
A look of quick intelligence between,
Though none had marked it 'mid the ſtirring ſcene

And the wild tumult that ſo ſhook the hall.
But now, remembered, Thorkell bade them come
Still nearer, and that Narfi bear a bowl
Of wine to the old man, which was declined;
Then, bending o'er his harp, the minſtrel ſung.
With faltering hand at firſt the chords he preſſed,
In trembling tones at firſt his voice was heard,
But, fired at length by the wild ſoul of ſong,
In ſtrength and richneſs grew the ſwelling tones.

"When Harald Harfagra was king,
And ſat on Norway's throne
('T was Harald made the kingdom his,
And all the power his own),

"There dwelt at the court of Harald,
An Earl, who claimed that he
From the ancient kings of Norway
Could trace his pedigree.

"He won the favor of Harald
By bending to his will,
And the king endowed him richly
With lands and wealth, until

"His caſtles he counted by ſcores,
And ſhips like flocks that fly
Of the white-winged, ſailing ſea-birds
Amid the ocean ſky.

"But dearer than caſtles on land,
Ships upon the water,
A richer boon than e'en Harald's love
Was his only daughter.

"Fair as the gleam of the ſunſhine
When morning greets the ſight,
As the golden ſun, upriſing,
Rolls round 'mid crimſon light.

"Fairer than words can picture her,
Fairer than tongue can tell,
As fair as the dead we cheriſh,
Within our hearts that dwell.

"While war was raging around her
(The life of man was war),
The heart of the maid was gentle
As light of evening ſtar.

"She ſhuddered to think of battle,
Yet felt her pulſes ſtart
When they told ſome deed of daring,
Some deed of dauntleſs heart.

"And the maid had many ſuitors;
Her beauty and her grace
Won the hearts of thoſe old warriors,
A rude and ſavage race.

"And many a reckleſs ſoldier
Within his mailed breaſt
Had often breathed a ſtifled ſigh
His lips had ne'er confeſſed;

"And many who went to battle,
As their wild war-cries roſe,
Breathed ſoft the name of the maiden,
And daſhed againſt their foes.

"They recked not of death or danger,
For a wilder ſtrife by far
Had raged in their ſteel-clad boſoms,
Than ever raged in war.

"But Skeggi, a famous warrior,
And rich in ſhips and land,
Was ſtill a conſtant wooer
For gentle Unna's hand.

"And he won her father's favor,
Who bade his daughter ſee
In Skeggi a fitting huſband,
For ſhe his wife muſt be.

"But the maiden mourned in ſecret,
Mourned with a grieving heart,
For ſhe could not love the warrior,
And oft her tears would ſtart, —

"Would ſtart as ſhe thought of another,
A gentle, gallant youth,
To whom ſhe had pledged in ſecret
Her heart in maiden truth.

"But her lover was poor, and yet
He had not won a fame,
And her father laughed at the ſtripling,
A youth without a name.

"But the heart of a dauntleſs race
Beat in his youthful breaſt,
And he vowed to win the maiden,
Or death ſhould be his reſt.

"And Unna told her father
How he had won her heart,
But the Earl was proud, and bade her
From this weak love to part.

"With her tears ſhe ſought to move him,
But he coldly turned away,
And, true to his word with Skeggi,
He fixed her wedding-day.

"At length the fatal day arrived,
The day when ſhe muſt wed
The huſband her ſire had choſen, —
She wiſhed that ſhe was dead.

"In the hall were hung the banners,
A rich and gallant ſhow,
And Skeggi was fluſhed and joyous,
But Unna white as ſnow.

"The Earl had filled up a goblet
Of rich and ſparkling wine:
'I drink,' cried he, 'to thee, Skeggi!
Now thou art ſon of mine.'

"But ere he had drained the goblet,
There came a ruſhing ſound,
That ſtartled the gueſts aſſembled,
And ſhook the flags around.

"That ruſhing ſound came ſweeping on
Like ſwell of ocean wave,
And Skeggi felt his ſtrong heart tremble,
That heart he thought ſo brave.

"Through opening doors a tide ruſhed in,
Of men and ſteel that tide;
Fair Unna's heart leaped up how wildly,—
Her lover, by her ſide,

"Led on that band to win the maid,
Or, true to plighted word,
Lay down his life before the hazard,
The hazard of the ſword.

"The clash of steel rung wild and high,
And poured a crimson flow, —
Libations of the heart's red wine
Fell on the floor below.

"Through blood and strife the maid was borne
From that wild scene away,
Fainting, within her lover's arms
A helpless burden lay.

"They gained the shore, the bark was launched,
Quickly they spread the sail,
The fleetest ship of all the North
Was soon before the gale.

"Behind them came a thousand foes,
The sea with sails was white,
Like the swift sea-bird on they flew,
And vanished in the night.

"Thus Skeggi lost his lovely bride,
And yet, throughout the night,
He still sailed on; at morning's dawn
There was no sail in sight.

"Weary and sad, he turned his bark,
Homeward he steered his way,
And often cursed in bitterness
That darkly-ending day.

"And thus the youth the maiden won;
He bore her ſouthward far,
And in new lands he gained a name
By valiant deeds in war.

"But dearer than the name he gained,
Dearer than all beſide, —
Than wealth and honors, that were his, —
Was his fair Norſeman bride.

"And many ſons were born to him,
Inheriting his fame:
Beſt known of theſe throughout the North
Was Ogmund's famous name."

Thus far the minſtrel ſung; but with the name,
The hated name of Ogmund, there aroſe
A ſound of tumult wild throughout the hall,
And darkening brows and angry eyes were bent
On the old harper, while his voice was drowned
In their loud, angry murmurs: for Skeggi
Was Thorkell's ſire, and ſuch a tale as this
Was all unſuited to the time and place.

On Thorkell's brow was ſeen the fluſh of rage;
He bade his ſervants break the minſtrel's harp,
And bear the old man and the boy away,
And lock them in the vaults beneath the hall,

Till he might judge what puniſhment was due
For their raſh deed. The old man's harp was ſeized,
And daſhed in pieces at his very feet.
His tall form ſtraightened, and his eye flaſhed fire, —
One ſtep he took, as though his age was loſt
In the fierce inſult, but the boy advanced,
And, with a whiſpered word, reſtrained him;
Then, with downcaſt eyes and trembling ſtep,
They led him from the hall. But once he turned,
And caſt a glance of hate and menace round,
At which they only ſcoffed; and Narfi cried:
"The old man's angry that we did not chooſe
To praiſe his ſinging; or he fears the cold,
Damp vault may ſpoil the ſweetneſs of his voice."
But Thorkell bade him hold his peace, for much
It chafed him that the praiſe of Ogmund's race
Should thus have ſounded in his banquet-hall.

Yermak.

CANTO III.

THE ESCAPE.

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THE ESCAPE.

GUDRIDA, Thorkell's dame, had left the feaſt,
And Steingerda and all the lady gueſts
Attended her; as wilder grew the ſcene
Each moment, for the red, bright, ſparkling wine
Uſurped fair Reaſon's throne within each brain.
Thorkell withdrew, for age, with iron hand,
Had cruſhed in him the power, that once was his,
To revel with the wildeſt, and prolong
Through midnight to the dawn the mad carouſe.
The revel ſtill grew wilder; all reſtraint
Was now caſt off, and each abandoned him
To the wild genius of the feſtal night.
The mingling voices of an hundred gueſts
Were raiſed together, and in diſcord oft;
And then again thoſe maſſive caſtle-walls
Seemed reeling inward with the wild refrain,

As ſome old ſong or feſtal glee was ſung,
And each one joined with fierce and frantic zeal.

Narfi was ſeated in the chair of ſtate,
Where Thorkell late had ſat; and he alone
Of all the feaſters in that banquet-hall
Was not bewildered or o'erpowered with wine.
With meditative face, ſhading his eyes
With his white hand, he ſat, observing all
That chanced around, but quite unmoved and calm
Amid a tumult might have waked the dead.
And thus, thought he, men ſeek for happineſs:
"O weak and brainleſs fools! what joy is there
In thus degrading man below the brutes!
Taking away from him the only thing,
His reaſon, that makes him better than the herds
Of grazing cattle, wand'ring o'er our hills! —
But ſoft! I ſee before me many men
Of wiſdom greater than I dare to claim:
Men of ſound minds, of ſtrong and earneſt thought —
And am I better than all theſe I ſee
Thus drowned and ſtupefied in this red wine?
Or is there magic in your ruby ſtream,
Enchanting, with a deadly ſerpent power,
Your trembling captives, while you drink their blood,

Changing the godlike mind to worthleſs droſs!"
As thus he thought, and from a flagon poured
Its ſparkling contents on the oaken floor,
His mind reverted to the minſtrel's ſong;
And long he pondered, till a ſudden thought
Flaſhed on his brain: riſing, he ſeized a torch,
And bent his ſteps toward the vaults that lay,
Dreary and dark, beneath the banquet-hall.

A narrow room — eight paces in its length
By four in breadth, the walls and floor of ſtone,
The ceiling timber, and the door of oak —
Confined the minſtrel who had dared to ſing
The praiſe of Thorkell's foe before that chief,
And the fair boy, his harp-bearer, who ſhared
His fortunes in the cold and dreary cell.
Againſt the wall, upon the other ſide
Of the long corridor, from which the vaults
Had entrance, thoſe who brought the captives here
Had placed a torch, whoſe flickering light
Shone faintly through the narrow open ſpace
Above the door, and traced againſt the wall
And on the floor the croſſings of the bars
That ſpread their iron network over it,
Admitting air and the faint, ſtruggling light.
No bed, no ſtraw, nothing but naked walls
And damp, cold floor! It was a dreary place

To paſs a night; and the uncertainty
Of how much longer time their fate to ſtay
Within its walls made it ſeem ſtill more drear.

Their jailers gone, the minſtrel with a ſtart
Sprung up erect, and paced with rapid ſtrides
The narrow room. His hands were clenched in rage,
And all the paſſions he had ſmothered down
Now woke to fury in his heaving breaſt.
Calm and ſerene the boy looked on, unmoved
By all the tempeſt of his rage, until,
Its wild burſt o'er, the minſtrel grew more calm;
And then the boy advanced toward him,
And, placing one hand on his ſhoulder, ſaid:
"Paſſion is idle; for the ſong you ſung
Was ſung in daring, to awake their rage, —
You knew the vengeance of an angry foe
Would fall on you, and reckleſs braved that rage.
Now, Kormak, do not waſte your energy
In hurling curſes, which can do no harm
To thoſe at whom you aim; but let us ſee
How beſt we can diſpoſe to paſs the night
In theſe poor lodgings; for ſome ſleep we'll need,
And with to-morrow may come ſtirring ſcenes."

Kormak put one arm round his brother's neck,
Looking in his calm, gentle eyes, he ſaid

"Your brave, ſtrong heart, dear brother, tells to me
How much more manly you are than I am;
While I in paſſion rage and fret myſelf,
Waſting my energy and ſtrength and time,
You calmly think, — are always ſtill unmoved:
But when the time for ſtirring action comes, —
When danger threatens, — then a lion heart
Speaks out in daring from thoſe gentle eyes.
In time of danger I am fearleſs too,
But cannot curb my paſſion, nor reſtrain
Impatience or deſire, as you, dear brother, can."

And now they talked of all had chanced that night, —
Of Thorkell's enmity; how their mad freak
Had placed them in his power; and what their fate,
If he ſhould learn who they, his captives, were.
But no ſigh or vain regret they uttered:
Spoke in all calmneſs of the coming morn,
And meaſured all their chances for eſcape.
And Kormak, too, found time to ſpeak again
Of fair Steingerda, — her grace, her beauty:
Not e'en reflecting that her luſtrous eyes
Had been the lure to this their ſtrange miſhap;
Or, if the thought occurred, his heart leaped up,
And welcomed every danger for her ſake.

Now, in one corner of their dreary cell,
Upon their cloaks the brothers laid them down,
And ſoon, in ſpite of danger, cold, or e'en
Of anxious thoughts, they loſt themſelves in ſleep.
At times the muffled ſounds above their heads
Waked them a moment, and they fell aſleep
Again, with faint conſciouſneſs of waking.

When Steingerda had left the banquet-hall,
She ſought her chamber; but the ſounds that came
Wild from below forbade the thought of ſleep.
Seated beſide the fire, unconſciously
Her thoughts turned to the minſtrel and his ſong;
And much ſhe dwelt upon the fearful hate
That urged her father to a fierce revenge
On Ogmund's ſons, for wrongs done by their ſire;
And then the form of Kormak came before
Her meditative mind, — and well ſhe knew
There was no hatred in her heart toward him;
For ſhe had learned at length, when he was gone,
That it was Kormak who had been her gueſt
That eve at Gnupsdale; and ſince then her thoughts
She often found returning to the youth,

Recalling thoſe few words he ſaid to her.
And now the minſtrel and her evening gueſt,
In ſpite of her, engroſſed her thoughts, and came
Always together, mingling in her mind.
At length the thought occurred to her to ſeek
The vault where Thorkell had impriſoned him,
And queſtion the old bard, why he had ſung
The ſong that ſo excited Thorkell's rage.
She called her maid; the girl, quite overcome
With wearineſs, in ſpite of all the ſounds
That thundered ſtill below, had fallen aſleep:
So, taking up her lamp, and throwing on
A heavy cloak, — for the night air was cold, —
She went alone toward the dungeon vaults.

He who had ſeen her as ſhe paſſed along,
So ſilent and ſo fair, through thoſe rude halls,
Her beauty half unſeen, and yet augmented,
By the faint glimmer of her fluttering light,
Might well have thought ſome Peri of the air
Had left her home amid the realms of light,
To do a good deed for weak, erring man. —
Yet oft within the faireſt forms are found
The ſouls leaſt beauteous; — for curioſity,
Or woman's light caprice, Steingerda ſought
Her father's captives at this lonely hour;
Or perchance the adventure of the act

Had lured her to it; but not that holy thought
That bids the gentle heart to thoſe that mourn
Go offer conſolation, urged her on.
She had a ſoft and kindly woman's heart,
That would not do a cruel act; but yet
By her fair preſence in his lonely cell
She might inflict on that poor captive youth
A deeper wound than e'en her father's hate,
In all its fierceneſs, had the power to give.

The bolts were drawn, the heavy key was turned,
And Narfi entered at the opening door;
His glittering dreſs contraſted with the walls,
Like diamonds flaſhing in a leaden ring.
Still on the floor the minſtrel and the boy
Were lying. Narfi held his torch above
Their heads, and with a ſcrutinizing eye
Examined the appointments of their dreſs,
And laſt their faces; Thorgils' gentle eye
Was bent, with look of childiſh wonderment,
Upon his rich-apparelled viſitor,
And Narfi turned from him, well ſatiſfied
That he, at leaſt, was only what he ſeemed, —
A very ſimple boy, the harp-bearer.
But when he met the minſtrel's eye, its flaſh
Had more of youth than trembling age in it:
And his firm limbs, not wholly hid from view

Within his ample cloak, ſhowed full and round,
And lacked the weak and ſhrunken form of age.
A smile aroſe on Narfi's ſcornful lip,
As thus he found his firſt ſuſpicion true.
Still as a ſtatue, with his blazing torch
Throwing its full, red light on them, he ſtood.
At length he ſpoke: —

"Minſtrel, in vain you ſeek
To cover youth with age. Old you are not;
Nor are you wandering minſtrel, as you ſeem,
Though ſomething of the minſtrel's art is yours,
And you can ſing a very ſtirring ſong.
And did you think to ſing your ſather's praiſe
Here in theſe walls, the dwelling of his foe,
And paſs unharmed away? Kormak, your fate
Is ſealed; and you will pay the penalty
Of death for this, your lateſt, maddeſt act.
And your young brother, in his home at Mel,
Shall ſoon be wakened with a ſtorm of ſteel;
And all the wrongs done to our noble houſe,
By your baſe robber ſire, in blood avenged."
Kormak ſprung up, and dropped the ſhrouding cloak
From off his agile limbs; with flaſhing eye
He anſwered him: "He was no robber, ſlave!
Back to your maſter! tell him, that his foe
Hurls a defiance in his very teeth.

Think you my ſoul is tamed, becauſe my limbs
Are bound within this dungeon? Think it not:
No more I fear your maſter, Thorkell, now,
Than when he threatened what he could not do."
Narfi had drawn his ſword when Kormak roſe,
But never moved a foot. "Wear out," he ſaid,
"Your few brief hours in curſing: thus alone
Have you the power to vent your rage on us;
For you are harmleſs as a hiſſing ſnake
Whoſe fangs have been extracted. Now to ſleep,
If ſleep you can: to-morrow you muſt die."

Narfi was gone; his footſteps died away
In the long corridor, on the ſtairway.
Once more the brothers laid them down to ſleep
The few ſhort hours till morn; but once again
There came the ſound of footſteps, till at length
It ſtopped before their door: the key was turned;
Again the heavy door ſwung grating back:
Oſwald, the jailer, entered, raiſed his torch,
And looked around, and then paſſed out again,
And Steingerda advanced. Kormak beheld,
But ſcarce could deem the viſion real, ſo fair
So dreamlike in her beauty the young girl
Stood, trying to pierce the gloom; for her lamp,
Flickering in the doorway, gave faint light,
And Oſwald's torch was ſhaded by the wall.
"Minſtrel," ſhe ſaid, "you braved my father's
rage;

Yet ſtill, in pity for your age and art,
I fain would know why thus you dared to ſing;
I fain would ſhield you from the fate you
ſought."

"Fair lady," ſpoke the minſtrel, "you alone
Are cauſe of this adventure; for your love
The youth you ſheltered from the raging ſtorm
One eve at Gnupsdale, though your father's foe,
Has come to ſeek you in your father's hall;
And, though death meet him, feel his heart
repaid
By one bright ſmile, one gentle look from thee."
And Kormak threw aſide the ſilver hair,
His badge of age, and, kneeling at her feet,
Poured out his wild, paſſionate heart of love,
With the rich eloquence that lovers have.
And Steingerda, amazed, bewildered, liſtened,
While Kormak kiſſed her hand, and uttered vows
That ſcarce ſhe heard in her bewilderment.
"But why awake my father's rage?" ſhe ſaid;
"Wherefore your ſong?"
"I heard them baſely ſpeak
Of my brave father: they called him robber;
My ſoul chafed at it; but I could not ſpeak
While my full heart was hiſſing hot to tell,
That, when he lived, he taught them fairer
ſpeech,

But now, being dead, their coward lips were
looſed
To ſlander him. I could not tell them this,
For my diſguiſe; but when they bade me ſing,
The thought came to me, that, in Thorkell's hall,
'T were ſome revenge to ſing my grandſire's
praiſe;
And hence my ſong."
"Your life is forfeited
The inſtant that my father knows your name."

"That gay-dreſſed youth who ſtood by
Thorkell's chair
Has lately left us, threatening me with death.
He knows of my diſguiſe; though how he
gueſſed
My name I cannot tell."
Steingerda muſed,
But quickly ſaid: "If you to-morrow morn
Are found within theſe walls, no power can ſave
You from my father's long-delayed revenge.
If that I dare releaſe my father's foe,
Will you, for love of me, appeaſe his wrath
By ſuch conceſſions, in your power to make,
As may at length extinguiſh this fierce feud,
And in its place build up a friendſhip ſtrong?"

"For love of thee," Kormak replied to her,

"There's naught I will not do, ſo honor
And my dead father's name, that now I bear
Proudly and bravely, ſhall receive no ſtain.
I were ſo much leſs worthy of thy love,
If I could ſtoop to aught unworthily:
I muſt not tamper with my father's fame,
A heritage of honor or of ſhame, —
Honor, if I keep it ſtill unblemiſhed,
But ſhame, if I ſhould fully his brave ſhield
By act unworthy of my father's ſon.
But that which one ſtrong, earneſt heart may do,
With aid of friends and youth and enterpriſe,
That will I do, to win a boon ſo dear
As thy rich heart, fair lady. But perchance
All this I ſpeak in vain; yet in my heart
There is a ſanguine voice, and it tells me
I ſhall not die to-morrow, — ſhall eſcape;
If through thy kindly aid, then doubly dear
Will be thy image, ſhrined within my heart."
Then Kormak took his brother by the hand,
And told the lady what a daring heart
Beat in that gentle, fair-haired, blue-eyed boy.

Oſwald ſtood by, with wonder in his eyes,
To ſee the aged minſtrel thus transformed.
Foſter-brother to his gentle lady,
He held the true devotion of his life
Due to her ſervice. Now ſhe turned to him:

"Oſwald," ſhe ſaid, "my dear foſter-brother,
This captive minſtrel is a youth I love,
And Thorkell has reſolved upon his death.
Dare you conduct him from theſe walls to-night,
And fly with him, and this brave boy, ere dawn
Beyond my father's anger and his power?"
"For thee I 'll dare whatever man may dare,
My lady," Oſwald anſwered.
"Then away!
Make all arrangements for their inſtant flight;
Saddle the horſes: ſteeds of ſwifteſt foot
Select from all that ſtable here to-night;
And ſhould you borrow of my father's gueſts,
The purpoſe muſt excuſe for once the breach
Of hoſpitality. Uſe urgent haſte,
For one hour later underneath this roof,
And there would be no hope for your eſcape.
My father wakes at dawn; and well I know
That Narfi will not ſleep till he has poured
The night's diſcovery in his maſter's ear."
Oſwald was gone. "No longer muſt I ſtay,"
Steingerda ſaid; "wrong have I done to come
Here in the night, in ſecret, to your cell;
Nor had I come, perhaps, if I had known
It was no aged minſtrel whom I ſought.
Wrong have I done to hear the words of love
Spoken by one my father hates the moſt;
But my weak woman's heart is moved for you,

And thus I ſhield you from my father's hate.
But hear me, Kormak: do not ſeek again
To ſtir my father's rage againſt yourſelf
By ſuch wild deed as this; for were I not
A renegade from him whom I ſhould ſerve,
Your fates were ſealed: before to-morrow's ſun
Sunk in the weſt your ſouls were with the dead."
And Kormak kiſſed her hand again, while ſhe
Threw o'er his neck the ſilken ſcarf she wore,
And hurried from the cell; but at the door
Half turned, to give a laſt and farewell glance
To Kormak, kneeling ſtill, as at the ſhrine
Kneels Odin's rapt, adoring worſhipper.

When Narfi left the captives in their cell,
Dwelling on what had chanced, he firſt returned
Unto the revellers; but they were few
Who now remained awake. Upon the floor,
'Mid ſcattered goblets, and ſeats overturned,
And pools of wine, in ſtupid ſleep were ſeen
The mad carouſers of an hour ago.
Sleep had o'erwhelmed their wine-encumbered minds,
And in the midſt of ſong and ſpeech they fell,
And as they fell they ſlept. Narfi beheld
The changed appearance of the hall, and ſmiled,
But ſtayed not long; the heated, o'er-breathed air.

The fumes of wine and ale, the long-drawn breaths
Of the deep, heavy ſleepers, troubled him,
And he went forth, ſtill thinking, as he paſſed
Into the night-air, of his diſcovery
Of Kormak, and ſtill ſeeking for the clew
To his ſtrange viſit there: nor could he frame
Another purpoſe than his earlieſt thought.
He knew that Kormak had met Steingerda
At Gnupsdale, and much he feared more than once
Had been her viſitor. Why came he here?
And why had he excited Thorkell's ire
By his mad ſong? This would not further love.
Himſelf leſs careleſs, he knew not what deeds
Might be performed for very reckleſſneſs,
And ſought a reaſon for a reckleſs act.

Beſides the hate he bore the captive youth,
In common with the wronged houſe of Thorkell,
There was another reaſon for his joy
In finding Kormak in the aged bard:
He loved Steingerda, though that love unknown
To all but his own heart; and ambition
Joined with love had been the leading motives
Guiding his action, ruling all his thoughts,
For many, many months; he knew himſelf
Full of ſtratagems, and had dared to hope

He might by theſe achieve the purpoſed ends
Of both his paſſions, — marry his miſtreſs,
And win through her poſition. Now, thought he,
I can gain more of Thorkell's confidence
By this diſcloſure, at the ſame time ſtrike
A dangerous rival from my path of love:
Thus I advance ſtill nearer to my ends.
The ſound of horſes' feet arouſed his thoughts;
Three horſemen came dim through the ſhades of night,
And almoſt rode on him. As he drew back,
The foremoſt hailed him: "Ho, Sir Boaſter! ſtay,
And bear a meſſage from me to your lord:
Tell him the minſtrel could not wait for him,
But ſends, inſtead, his greeting. For yourſelf,
Learn not to threat; for boaſting words are weak,
And often are as unfulfilled as thoſe
You gave to me to-night. I may not ſtay:
The lines of day are lighting up the eaſt,
And time is precious; for you propheſied
This day ſhould be my laſt: and ſo adieu!"
And Narfi ſaw the three daſh on again.
He ſtood transfixed, gazing on vacancy
Where they had vaniſhed; then, as the ſounding
Of their quick gallop died away, at length
The power of utterance came back to his tongue,

And through his close-set lips he hissed his curse,
Its burning heat quenched by the cold night-air,
Upon their flight; in frenzy stamped his foot
Upon the frozen earth, that took the blow
As little harmed by it as those he cursed
Were by the maledictions heaped on them.
His anger spent, he turned toward the gate,
Questioning in his mind by what strange means
The captives had escaped. Raising his eyes,
He saw the gleaming of the light come down
From a high casement in the lofty wall
Of the square tower upon the western side.
"My lady's lamp is burning late," he said.
"Who was their jailer? Oswald! All is clear!
Her foster-brother set her lover free!
That love is hopeless, lady! If not I,
At least not he shall ever be thy lord!"
With upturned face and burning eyes he spoke,
But the cold walls heard not his threatening words.
Conscious of weakness, conscious too of strength,
He summoned all his art to guide his way,
Dark and obscure, toward his destined end.

Kormak.

CANTO IV.

BATTLE ISLE.

CANTO IV.

BATTLE ISLE.

THE winter months were paſt, — thoſe cold, long months
Through which the ſunſhine ſleeps, forgetting earth,
Or looking coldly and obliquely down;
No loving warmth in even noontide beams,
No friendſhip in his rays. But awaking
From his long lethargy, at laſt the ſun
Began to climb the arch, and lift the veil
That hid his kindneſs from the eyes of men,
And ſhow himſelf again the genial god
Before whoſe face the tributary world
Arrays itſelf in verdure. The white robe
Of frigid Winter melted in his light;
The faſt-bound ſtreams reſumed their rapid flow;
Through the warm earth the little blades of graſs
Came forth ſo cautiouſly, as if in fear

The icy blaſts of winter might return
To kill their tender life; the naked trees
Arrayed their hundred arms in leafy garb,
And drank the ſunbeams up. From milder climes
Came back the migratory flocks, that learn
By Nature's telegrams when the young Spring
Leaps to his ſeat, the ruler of the world,
And Winter melts in his cold ſnows away.
And in this northern clime a wondrous change
Came in a few bright days: the dreary world
Lay one day like the lifeleſs cryſalis,
The next arrayed itſelf in ſummer's hues, —
A butterfly, and like the butterfly,
Flaſhed gayly, brightly, through as brief a life.

There was an iſland with a rocky ſhore
Upon its northern ſide, where the high crags
Climbed up above the ſea a thouſand feet;
Many an iceberg, floating from the north,
Had wrecked itſelf upon thoſe moveleſs rocks,
And ſhivered peak by peak, until the ſea
Was covered with a floating wreck of ice, —
The crumbled fragments of the frozen berg,
That once was vaſter than the iſland crags
On which its voyage was wrecked. A mile away
From the main ſhore of Iceland was the iſle;
Though the wild, rocky ſhore was ſtrewn with ice

Through the whole year, yet, ſloping from the crags
Toward the ſouth and weſt, the other ſhore
Caught the firſt ſunſhine of the early Spring,
Put the firſt verdure of the ſeaſon on,
And ſmiled ſecure beneath the rocky wall.
It was a ſunny ſpot, as fair and bright
As though it lay within a milder zone:
Here the huge pines roſe towering to the ſky,
Clothed in their garb of an eternal green;
While groves of birch-trees bent their graceful boughs
To the light airs breathed gently from the ſouth;
And the green graſs grew greener, freſher here
Than on the mainland ſhore. No one dwelt here:
But oft in ſummer parties came, and pitched
In this ſweet ſpot their tents, and whiled away
The days, forgetful that they lived ſo near
The frozen regions of perpetual cold, —
The home of glaciers, and thoſe northern ſeas,
Fixed, ſilent, motionleſs, congealed forever.

No one dwelt here; yet 'mid the lofty pines
I ſee white tents, and many moving forms:
Perchance ſome idlers come to greet the Spring
In this fair ſpot where firſt ſhe greets the earth.
Upon an open ſpace, a graſſy lawn,
Smooth as a carpet, ſloping to the weſt,

And ſoft with verdure, the encampment ſtood.
The pine-trees formed the back ; advanced from
theſe,
Yet ſcarce beyond their ſhade, a group of tents,
With ſtreamers gayly floating from their peaks,
Were cluſtered. On the right and on the left,
Two arrow-flights apart, were alſo ſet
Two other groups of tents : ſeparate both,
Like little villages ; in each a tent
Higher than thoſe around, in front of which
From a tall ſtandard hung a blazoned flag :
The talleſt ſtandard ſtood before the group
Of tents that formed the centre. Armed men
Were moving to and fro, and lances, ſwords,
And ſuits of mail flaſhed brightly in the rays
Of the now ſetting ſun ; yet mixed with theſe
Were other forms, that wore no warlike mien :
For there were groups of ladies, gayly dreſt,
Straying from tent to tent, watching the ſun,
As in a crimſon glow his bright orb ſunk
Beneath the mainland's white-topped mountain
heights,
Kindling their cold ſnows with his lurid fire,
As he withdrew behind their ridgy wall ;
Or chatting gayly of the coming morn,
Or flirting, 'mid the birch-groves, with the
youths
Who bore them company. Thus evening paſſed,

And night came down amid the dark-leaved
pines,
And hushed them all to silence and repose.

When Thorkell learned that his most hated foe
Had been within his power, and yet escaped,
His rage o'erleaped all bounds: fiercely he hurled
On Narfi the torrent of his curses;
That artful youth in silence bent his head
Until the storm was past; nor did he speak
The thought within his heart, that Steingerda
Had given the means to set the captives free:
He locked this secret fast within his breast,
Hoping to find a time when it might serve
Some better service than it now could serve;
Nor did he deem it wise to bring the rage
Of Thorkell on the lady; for he knew
That she would trace the thought back to its
source,
And he should bear the blame; and then, beside,
He could not prove his shrewd suspicion true.
And now the long-nursed plan in Thorkell's
heart,
Of an armed vengeance, grew dearer to him;
And all the preparation, mustering men,
Collecting arms, to make that vengeance sure,
Went briskly on; but scarce a week had passed,
When came a messenger from Olaf Pa,

Whoſe Thingſman Thorkell was, forbidding him
To march againſt his neighbor with armed men,
To plunge in war and blood the peaceful land
O'er which he claimed to rule. Thorkell at firſt
Bade Olaf's meſſenger return to him
Who ſent him, with the anſwer, that he choſe
To bear no queſtion of his purpoſed act, —
That he denied the right to interfere
To Olaf Pa, or any living man.
But Narfi calmed his maſter's boiling rage,
Showing him thus that he would bring himſelf
To certain ruin ; and counſelled him to lay
His wrongs before the chief, and claim from him
That the eſtates the father took by force
The ſons ſhould now return : "And weakened thus,
'T will then be eaſy," cunning Narfi ſaid,
"To wreak more vengeance on their beggared heads ;
But 't is deſtruction to oppoſe your chief:
Yield to his will ; you but delay the hour
Of vengeance; and that hour will ſurely come."
Then Thorkell, moſt reluctantly, at laſt
Agreed to ſend a gentler anſwer back ;
And Narfi was deſpatched to lay the claims
Before the chief.

When Olaf heard the cauſe
That Narfi brought to him, he ſent at once

For Kormak and his brother: heard the whole,
On either ſide, and, after much debate,
Decreed a ſingle combat ſhould decide
The weighty difference that was between them:
Bade them each ſend a champion to the liſts;
Appointed time and place; and having learned
From Kormak of his love for Steingerda,
Made the conditions of the battle theſe, —
If Thorkell's champion ſhould be overcome,
Thorkell ſhould give his daughter to the youth;
But if Kormak ſhould fail, the large eſtates
That Ogmund took from Thorkell ſhould return
Unto their firſt poſſeſſor. The appointed time
Had come; and hence on Battle Iſle were ſeen
The tents, the buſtle, and the armed men;
For here had Olaf ſummoned them to meet,
And for the morrow was the combat ſet.

While yet alone a few gray lines of light,
And fading ſtars, told that the morning hour
Was near at hand, Kormak had left his tent,
And with his brother ſought the rocky heights
To catch the early ſunlight. From his feet,
Far down the precipitous crag, the waves
Came ſwelling inward from the open ſea,
Daſhing the floating ice upon the ſhore,
Grinding to fragments maſſes huge as ſhips,
And piling maſs on maſs, only to cruſh

The whole, as ſome great wave came in,
Hurling the weight of many thouſand tons
Light as a bubble on its foaming creſts.
Kormak ſtood gazing far away to ſea,
Where the dark line of waters met the ſky,
On which had now appeared the bluſh of dawn,
Faintly reflected in a roſeate tint,
That glimmered on the ſea; — but not of dawn,
Nor of the ſea, nor of the ocean airs,
That ſwept their cooling freſhneſs o'er his brow,
Nor of the combat that a few hours more
Would bring to him, did Kormak think that morn.
'T was no armed brow that roſe above the ſea,
And fixed his eye, till faded ſea and ſky,
And lived alone the viſion, — a fair face,
With curls of golden hair, and deep blue eyes,
In which her gentle heart ſeemed floating up
To give his own her greeting, met his eye,
And fixed him there enchanted. A long ſigh
Swelled in his boſom as the viſion paſſed,
Melting again in wave from whence it roſe.
"A woful ſigh," quoth Thorgils; "I am glad
That 't was I alone, my loveſick brother,
Who heard that ſigh; an enemy might ſay
You ſighed to think of Narfi's ſtrength of arm;
But I do think the ſigh was due to one
Whoſe ſtrength lies not in arms: no! I am wrong;

Two ſnowy arms will often move a heart
That hundred-armed Briareus might aſſail,
And ſeek to bend in vain. Liſten, brother,
And I will ſing a ſong will pleaſe you now,
Or I will ne'er attempt to ſing again.

"I ſtood on the rocky ocean-ſhore,
As the waves came wildly rolling in;
And deep on my ear came the waters' roar,
And all around me the ocean's din;

"And my heart ſprung out to meet each wave,
To roll and toſs on its foamy creſt;
For I loved the muſic ocean gave,
And I longed to plunge on her heaving breaſt.

"I lay at night 'mid the pine-trees' ſhade,
And heard them ſigh as the wind ſwept paſt;
I loved the ſighs that their branches made, —
The ſong they ſung with the wind's wild blaſt.

"I heard the yelp of the ſtraining pack
When firſt to view came the hunted game,
Wildly I echoed the glad ſounds back,
And my hunter's heart was all aflame.

"I ſtood by the ſacred Druid-ſtone,
And heard the chant, and the myſtic ſtrain;
And I felt a might, beyond my own
Sweep o'er my ſoul with the deep refrain.

"I heard the youth with his blitheſome ſong,
And the infant liſp his artleſs lay;
My heart has ſwept with the ſtrains along,
And bowed itſelf to their ſimple ſway.

"Laſt night we wandered from all apart,
And, down on the ocean's marge of ſand,
I aſked the gift of her maiden heart,
And claſped in my own her trembling hand.

"The deareſt ſound that was ever heard
Was the whiſpered word ſhe ſpoke to me;
And my own rough heart was as madly ſtirred
By that ſoft word as man's heart could be.

"O, tell me not of the ſongs they ſing
In Odin's palace, above the ſkies!
Valhalla! thy halls may wildly ring!
The ſong of the ſpheres may round me riſe!

"It never can drown that low, ſweet tone
She ſpoke laſt night on the ſandy ſhore:
That tone will live in my heart alone,
When Odin's palace ſhall be no more."

As Thorgils ceaſed his ſong, he turned his eyes
Toward the ſpot where Kormak late had been:
The place was vacant; but on looking round,
He ſaw his brother ſtanding on the verge

Of a high cliff that overhung the sea,
Where a ravine cleft the great wall in twain,
And formed a narrow channel, into which
The green waves plunged, but quick were dashed
to foam,
And rose, as white as milk, along the walls,
And then fell back again to join the swell
Of the next wave advancing; — there he stood,
A stone's-throw off, his plumed cap in his hand;
And on the other side of the huge rift
Thorgils beheld the fluttering of a dress,
And, drawing nearer, recognized the face
And the light form of her who set them free
From Thorkell's power. They may not need
me there,
The young man thought, and climbed again the
rocks
Down to the vale below. But Kormak stayed
To hear the lady bid him win her hand,
And take the heart he had already won.
"Dear lady! this would nerve a feeble hand,
Fill up with daring e'en a coward's heart:
I feel within my heart a power spring up
I never knew before; — thy love would lift
A peasant to a king! Doubt not the end:
If thy fair lips put up their prayer for me,
If thy soft heart appeal unto the gods,
They never can deny you; — and the charm

Of thy dear love will be a coat of mail
To fence me round about; and Narfi's ſword,
Though dug from out the ancient ſea-king's grave,
And charmed by blood-rites at the midnight hour,
In Druid-ring, told by the lips inſpired
Of the all-ſacred prieſts, will harmleſs fall
On my broad ſhield, thy love."
"I do truſt you,
And yet, with woman's weakneſs, ſtill I fear,"
Steingerda ſaid; "though born and bred 'mid wars,
I love not war nor battle; ſtill I feel
Proud, my brave ſoldier, of your ſtrength and ſkill,
And I would have you win an added fame
By your brave deeds to-day. Adieu," ſhe ſaid,
"The ſun's bright edge is gleaming o'er the ſea:
'T was a ſtrange chance by which we met this morn;
But many feet will ſoon be climbing here,
And curious eyes may mark us."
"Dearest maid!"
Said Kormak, "I will win the right to-day
To claim your hand, or Battle Iſle ſhall be
Wedded to me by death; this ſilken ſcarf
You gave me once ſhall be my taliſman,

Your ſign of favor, twined around my breaſt,
While all is yours within." And ſhe was gone —
The waves came daſhing through the narrow way,
And then ſwept out again: he marked them not;
A moment ſtood, gazing where ſhe had been,
Then turned to ſeek the uneven pathway down;
His mind ſtill dreamily away from him,
And ſtill her image roſe amid the crags, —
A rugged framing for ſo fair a face.

The ſun had riſen, but his rays were hid
From the encampment by the rocky wall
That ſhut the ocean airs out from the vale,
And caſt huge ſhadows darkly o'er the pines,
And on the verdant ſlope. Againſt the ſky,
So brightly gleaming with the crimſon light
And golden radiance of the morning ſun,
The wild and craggy battlemented rocks
Stood black and frowning, till the riſing ſun
At length looked o'er their tops, and brightly flung
Long golden lines upon the higheſt pines;
Danced o'er the groves of birch, juſt touched with light
The higheſt hillocks, calling into life
From every dew-drop richly tinted gems,
That far outſhone the cryſtals that they mocked
In their mad blaze of ſunlight. Now awoke

To active life the iſland viſitors;
From the white tents poured forth the buſy
forms;
From tent to tent run breathleſs meſſengers;
Around the ſtandard of their chief were met
The men of note, and Olaf, in their midſt,
Received their counſels, as each plan was weighed
And all the laws diſcuſſed by which they uſed
In thoſe old times to ſettle every caſe
Wherein a doubt of right and juſtice lay.

The flag of Olaf was an azure field,
Bearing on its centre an ice iſland
Floating upon the ſea; beneath this flag
The chieftain ſtood, amid a brilliant throng,
His Thingſmen, powerful chiefs, who only payed
A ſlight allegiance to their iſland lord,
Acknowledging his power, but ſuffered each
To be the ſupreme ruler over all
Who dwelt upon his lands; though once a year
Olaf convened a council of them all,
In which they framed ſome neceſſary laws,
And made deciſion, when the law of arms
Was not appealed to, of each ſeveral cauſe
Of difference that aroſe, by any chance,
Within the province. Higher up the mound
O'er which the banner flew had aſſembled
Many groups of ladies, for now drew near

The appointed hour of battle; and below,
An arrow's flight beyond the chieftain's flag,
Gathered retainers, ſoldiers, ſerfs, and all
Whoſe lower rank would not entitle them
To gain a place above; and here a rope,
Faſtened to ſtakes around a half-circle,
Kept the ſpace clear within, — an ample field,
In which the combatants were now to meet,
To meaſure ſtrength and ſkill, and life 'gainſt life.

The trumpets ſounded forth their martial notes;
The people ſhouted; every eye was turned
Toward the centre. From the throng of chiefs
That ſtood round Olaf, Kormak now advanced,
And, kneeling, ſwore to abide the judgment,
As battle ſhould decide; then took his place
Upon the field, and by his ſide, Thorgils,
His ſhield-bearer. And Thorkell then ſtood forth,
Raiſed up his aged hands, and took the oath:
Named Narfi as his champion, who at once,
In front of Kormak, took the place aſſigned
To him; and Thorkell's ſon, young Loptur, came
To be his ſhield-bearer. As they ſtood there,
And while the Holmgang laws were read aloud,
All eyes were bent on them; and all was huſhed

Into deep ſilence, as the herald read.
Each combatant was clad in mail, and held
Upright before him his two-handed ſword:
He had no other arms; helmets of ſteel,
But viſorleſs, — on Kormak's a white plume,
While Narfi's plume was red; iron gantlets
They wore, and over his cloſe mail was drawn,
On Kormak's breaſt, a ſilken ſcarf of green.
When Narfi firſt beheld this ſcarf, his eyes
Kindled with rage; for he recognized it
As one his miſtreſs had been uſed to wear;
And half he muttered, "That fair ſilk ſhall bear
A deeper ſtain, if envy, jealouſy,
And a deep hatred lend me any ſtrength."
The ſhield-bearers held, each on his right arm
An oval ſhield, covered with knobs of braſs;
They wore no mail, nor carried any arm,
Were lightly dreſſed; Thorgils had bound his brow
With a gold band, wearing nor cap nor plume,
But Loptur's cap was gayly plumed with red.

Again the trumpet notes rung out, — a ſign
The combat was begun: lightly they ſwung
The heavy ſwords above their heads, and moved
Toward each other; eye fixed upon eye,
And every nerve braced up. Kormak ſtruck firſt,
And Loptur caught the blow upon his ſhield,

But reeled and fell beneath the heavy ſtroke;
And Narfi's ſword cut Thorgils' ſhield in two
With its keen edge; then came quick ringing blows
As their ſwords met; but the trumpets ſounded,
And called them back. Thorgils' ſhield replaced, again
They came together; feints and ſtratagems,
And heavy blows, and quickly changing place,
Followed each other; their long ſwords would gleam
Swift through the air; and when you thought the blow
Almoſt upon the creſt, a ſhield would flaſh
Between. Advancing, Kormak ſtumbled, fell,
And Narfi's ſword came ſtraight above his head,
But Thorgils' ſhield caught the deſcending blow;
Again his ſhield was cleft; and from the helm
Of Kormak, riſing, glanced aſide the ſword;
Again they cloſed, and ſword was daſhed on ſword, —
One blow cut Narfi's ſcarlet plume away,
The next glanced downward from his poliſhed helm,
And broke the mail on his left arm, ſtaining
With blood the armor and the ſword. Again
The trumpets warned them back; Narfi bound up
His wounded arm with Loptur's ſcarf, and when

The trumpets ſounded, ruſhed upon Kormak
More madly than before, fearing his ſtrength
Would ſoon be ſapped by the faſt flowing blood
That moiſtened all his arm; and Thorgils' ſhield
Was for the third time cleft; Narfi preſſed on,
Struck Kormak on the creſt, but his ſword broke
With the ſtrong blow, and Kormak, reeling back,
At the ſame moment ſtruck at Narfi's helm,
And daſhed him to the earth — they raiſed him up,
But he was ſtunned, and lay a helpleſs weight
In Loptur's arms. A moment, all was ſtill;
Then Kormak, as, bewildered ſtill, he leaned
On his two-handed ſword, his father's gift,
Heard a long ſhout, and then the herald's voice
Proclaiming ſomething, — what, he knew not then,
For that laſt blow, reſounding on his helm,
Drowned every ſound beſide; and now he ſtood
Beneath the ſtandard. Olaf graſped his hand,
And he awaked from his bewilderment
To hear the greeting of his friends around,
To catch one glance of fair Steingerda's eye,
As from the throng ſhe paſſed; yet that one glance
Was dearer to him than the thouſand words
Of others' praiſes, — than his triumph even.

Yormak.

CANTO V.

THE SORCERESS.

CANTO V.

THE SORCERESS.

KORMAK and Thorgils, with a gallant band
Of friends, arrived at Tunga, to demand
The forfeit loſt and won at Battle Iſle, —
The hand of fair Steingerda. And Thorkell —
Though rage and paſſion warred within his breaſt, —
Though a hot fire blazed fiercely in his heart,
And in each vein the ſcanty blood of age
Thickened and tingled with a youthful force,
Born of his angry paſſion — received them
Moſt graciouſly; and taking Kormak's hand,
Thus anſwered him: —
"Your father did me wrong,
And I have ſworn revenge; but that fierce oath
The gods who ſway this lower realm of man,

And break and mar each plan that he may make,
To ſuit their higher purpoſe, have cancelled.
To their power I fain muſt yield: 't were madneſs
For me, a man, to combat with the gods.
I ſwore by Odin's ſacred ruling arm,
That his arbitrament, by battle ſhown,
Should govern me. He has ruled againſt me:
My daughter's hand is yours, — one condition
Alone I aſk of you. At Spakonfell
Lives one who has a power myſterious
And wonderful over all the fortunes
Of our houſe, — the famous witch Thorveiga.
Perhaps it is the whim of an old man,
To whose weak age a ſecond childhood comes, —
I would aſk her favorable aſſent
Unto this marriage; thus would be removed
A ſhapeleſs dread that lives within my heart
Of ſome impending ill about to fall
Upon the union of your father's ſon
With thoſe who were your father's bitter foes.
To-night I feaſt you as my future ſon, —
You and your friends; the hoſpitality
Of my poor houſe is yours; to-morrow morn
Seek you alone the witch's mountain hut,
And gain her favor; bring an oracle
Propitious from the gods, breathed through her lips,

And the third day I hail you as my ſon;
The marriage rites ſhall then be duly ſaid,
And ſhe you ſeek ſhall be your wedded wife.
Grant this, — my ſuperſtition or my whim,
As you may judge it; — it is all I aſk."

Once more in Tunga's ancient banquet-hall
Was revelry and feaſting; and old foes
Pledged cup to cup as flowed the ruddy wine,
And hand met hand that never met before
Save in the graſp of battle; tales of old
Were told to ears that never heard thoſe lips
Speak aught but challenge or a battle-cry;
The claſh of cups outrung the claſh of ſwords,
As each ſwore friendſhip to his ancient foe.
And Kormak, to his harp, ſung in thoſe halls,
That heard him once before, — not new diſ-
guiſed
By aged garb, but with his youthful limbs
In ſilken garments clad, and his dark hair
Thrown careleſs backward from his handſome
face,
Steingerda's ſcarf ſtill twined about his breaſt;
And all were ſilent when his ſong begun.

"Came Thorbiorn and all his band
To Mahfahlida's outer wall,
And loudly beat, with ſword in hand;
But no one anſwered to his call.

"'Thou thief, Thorarin!' then he cried,
'Where are the ſteeds you ſtole from me?
Give up your ſpoil, or worſe betide:
My vengeance now ſhall fall on thee!'

"And Black Thorarin ſtood within,
And laughed to hear the chieftain fret;
He ſaid, 'You curſed me once before,
But, braggart! I am living yet.'

"Then ſpoke Geirrida to her ſon, —
She, the enchantreſs, famed for ſkill
In magic art, — 'Well haſt thou won
The name you merit, Sluggard ſtill!

"'O ſlow Thorarin! 'tis not mine,
The ſluggiſh current of your life;
Nor did thy ſire bequeath it thee:
He bore no taunt, he ſhunned no ſtrife.'

"Thorarin heard her taunt, and cried,
'No more, my mother, peace! I go
To drive the boaſter from our gate:
Think you I fear to meet my foe?'

"Then backward ſwung the heavy gate,
And Black Thorarin ſtood beſide
His angry foe, and lightly ſaid,
'I come to meet the "worſe betide;"'

"And by his ſide his ſervants all,
With ſword and buckler, faced the foe;
To tumult wild the ſtrife aroſe:
Sword claſhed on ſword, blow followed blow.

"But Ada, Black Thorarin's wife,
Looked from a caſement in the wall
Down on the court, and 'mid the ſtrife,
She ſaw her huſband, ſtruggling, fall.

"She ſtayed no more, but ruſhed below,
Out 'mid the noiſy, wild warfare,
And caſt herſelf before the ſword
Of Thorbiorn, who ſlew her there.

"But Black Thorarin was not ſlain;
He fell, yet gained again his feet,
To ſee his bride ruſh wildly forth,
On Thorbiorn's ſword, her death to meet.

"The world ſpun round him as he gazed;
A fearful cry burſt from his lip;
On Thorbiorn he madly ruſhed,
And cut him down from helm to hip;

"Then knelt beſide his ſlaughtered wife,
And took her head upon his breaſt;
'O, ſpeak to me again!' he ſaid,
'My darling bride! my deareſt! beſt!

"'Thy lips are warm, though pale each cheek,
Thy pure, dear heart's-blood ſtains thy ſide;
Speak but one word, ere it be gone!
Speak but one word! my wife! my bride!

"'Alas! alas! ſhe will not ſpeak;
Mother, bring here your magic art:
Summon each ſpell, and ſtay the blood
That ebbs ſo ſwiftly from her heart.

"'Your ſpells are vain! in vain your power!
You cannot rule the ſtorm you woke!'
His head ſunk down upon his breaſt;
With a deep ſigh, his ſad heart broke.

"He never ſpoke, nor raiſed his head;
For Thorbiorn's ſword, when Ada fell,
And ſtained its blade with her pure blood,
Had ſlain with her's his life as well.

"And Geirrida, who ſaw him die,
Curſed the dread god that gave her power:
'An idle gift you gave to me,
That ſerves not in the needful hour!

"'Thus they who truſt thee are betrayed:
A bauble buys a ſoul ſo fair;
The bauble pleaſes for an hour;
The hour is paſt,—then comes deſpair!'

"That god — dread Loki — heard her curſe,
And cruſhed her in his angry might;
One frenzied ſhriek rung wildly forth,
As plunged her ſoul in endleſs night."

The ſong was ended, and a wild applauſe
Greeted the youthful bard; for every heart,
Fraught with the ſuperſtition of the age,
Felt the ſtrange thrill that ſuperſtition lends
To tales of wild adventure; every heart,
Though ſeldom tutored to a gentle thought,
Turned from the din of battle to lament
With Black Thorarin for his ſlaughtered wife.
And thus the feaſt went on; and midnight came
And paſſed, and left them at their revels ſtill.

At midnight, to the chamber of their chief
Oddur and Gudmund came; and Narfi led
Them there, where, while the feaſt and ſong went on
And revelry below, a plan was made.
Oddur and Gudmund took their chief's commands,
And, ſilently as they had come, retired.
Narfi diſmiſſed them from the weſtern gate,
Watching them till the duſk of Night had cloſed
Around her children; then he paſſed within,
And muttered, "Now at laſt it will be done:

The brothers will not fail; the brutes would
ſtrike
At ſleeping Odin, if their ſwords were paid
To ſhed his blood. Yes: the ſudden onſlaught
And their great ſtrength muſt give them victory,
If they obey directions. To make ſure,
Before 't is daylight I will go myſelf
To ſee the work performed; I have deſigned
To aſk Thorveiga what the future has
In ſtore for me. I have, in truth, no faith
That ſhe can tell me more than I could tell
Of what muſt come with time; but I would ſee
Her whom the people fear; would try my heart.
I never feared a mortal being yet,
So, dread Thorveiga, drop your Gorgon ſhield,
For ſuperſtition has no power o'er me."

Up, amid rocks and crags, at Spakonfell
Thorveiga dwelt, a ſorcereſs renowned
Through all the iſland; a rude ſtone-built hut,
Raiſed 'gainſt a caverned cleft in the huge rock
That frowned precipitous above, was her home.
Here, with her ſons, ſhe lived, apart from all,
In this wild, deſolate, and lone ravine.
Her name was ſpoken with a trembling dread,
And none had ſeen her ſave the daring few
Who ſought her hut to learn from her what fates
Lay darkly in the future, or to ſeek

A talisman wrought by her magic spells
And mystic power, — invulnerable mail,
A shield no sword could cleave, a thrice-charmed
sword,
Obtained by midnight spell from some old ghost,
Conjured to earth again by her dread power, —
A sword now gifted with strange strength to kill.
None ventured near the rocks where she abode,
And seldom was her dreaded name pronounced,
For all remembered Ulfar, and his death.
He was a hunter, who, delayed by night,
Waited until the moon arose, for light
To find his way down the rough mountain-side.
On the high rock that overhung the hut
Where dwelt Thorveiga and her brutish sons
He paused a moment in his steep descent;
And there he saw strange sights. A hundred
ghosts
Were dancing round a spectral wizard fire;
The dread Sorceress, Oddur, and Gudmund
Were mingling gayly with their midnight guests,
And dancing wildly to a dismal tune,
Beat on phantom drums by skeleton arms;
And all the rocky dell was filled with forms
Strange and uncouth. And Ulfar, trembling, saw
The moonbeams shining through transparent
shapes
From which no shadows fell; he saw, and swooned

On the cold rock, nor waked until the ſun
With morning beams ſhone on his frozen limbs,
And warmed them into life. Then with ſlow ſteps
He left the ſpot, but caſt one frightened glance
Into the dell below. All now was ſtill
And lifeleſs, and no ſign remained of thoſe
That he had ſeen dancing beneath the moon.
He told his friends, with trembling tongue, the tale;
But from that hour his ſtrength ebbed ſlow away,
And ere the ſeaſon paſſed away he died;
And it was whiſpered that he went to join
The ghoſts that danced before Thorveiga's hut.

Within her hut the Sorcereſs now ſat,
And twirled her flying wheel, from which the yarn
Spun rapidly. No light of day was there:
The hut was windowleſs, and from the cleft
And ragged cavern in the rock beyond
All light was cloſe ſhut out, ſave what was ſhed
O'er all around from a huge ſilver lamp,
Hung from the ceiling by a chain of bronze.
Upon the walls were ſtrangely mingled ſhield
And ſword, with the ſtuffed ſkins of ſnake and toad,
Lizard and tortoiſe; whitened bones, that ſeemed
As if of human kind. But ſhe who ſat,
Her muttering mingling with the noiſy wheel,

The living inmate of this ſtrange abode,
Herſelf was ſtranger than all elſe around:
A ſtately woman, with a pale, wild face,
O'er which fell ſtraggling locks of raven hair,
Laced here and there with threads of ſilver hue.
A gown of black was robed around her form,
From which contraſted, deathly pale, her face
And her half-naked breaſt. She raiſed her head,
Threw back her hair with thin and trembling
hands,
And ſtopped her rapid wheel, that ſhe might hear
With more diſtinctneſs the faint ſounds without
That came to her quick ear; for now the ſound
Of footſteps came along the rocky path
Up to the doorway. "It is a ſtranger,"
Thorveiga muttered, as ſhe raiſed the latch
In anſwer to his knocking. The daylight
Came flooding inward through the opening door,
Struggling a moment in the darkened hut
With the pale lamplight; and with the daylight
Narfi ſtepped o'er the threſhold. The door cloſed,
And, ere the youth could bear the change of light
Upon his eyes, Thorveiga once more ſat
Beſide her wheel, and plied the buſy thread
Then Narfi doffed his cap to her, and ſaid:
"I come, good mother, by your aid, to look
Beyond the preſent to the time to come.
Love and ambition, tell me of their fate,

And how to guide my ſteps in the dark way
Through which I paſs!"
When Narfi firſt appeared,
The Sorcereſs had caſt a quick, keen glance
On him, ere ſhe reſumed her ſeat. That glance
Narfi had loſt. When now ſhe heard him ſpeak,
Her hands fell idly by her ſide, her breath
Came gaſpingly; but ſtill the wheel ſped on,
Nor did ſhe raiſe her eyes. The youth drew forth
A purſe of gold, and dropped it at her feet.
Thorveiga raiſed her eyes: "Your name," ſhe
ſaid,
"Is Narfi; your father's name you know not;
Why aſk you not that, by my magic art,
I ſhould reveal your birth and parentage?"

The ruby color fled from Narfi's lip:
"If you have power," he ſaid, "I bid you ſpeak!"

"If I have power!" the Sorcereſs replied;
"Liſten and judge: you ſeek from me to know
The end of your ambition and your love?
You love Steingerda, daughter to Thorkell,
And your ambition is to gain the place
That Thorkell's death will vacate. Yours by
right
That place ſhould be, for *you are Thorkell's ſon!*
Well may you ſtart; but liſten to me ſtill.

" Many years ago, near Tajaldnes dwelt
Leidolf Kappa. His dwelling was a tower,
Rough-built of ſtone, that ſtood by the ſea-ſhore.
The coaſt was wild and rocky; but, beneath
The maſſive rocks on which the tower was built,
A narrow beach came up againſt the wall,
And every tide ſwept ſmooth the ſnow-white ſand
As it rolled out to ſea. One ſtormy night,
When the wild waves came plunging up the ſands
To daſh upon the rocks, Thorunna ſat,
And, from a window in the lofty tower
Gazed o'er the troubled ſea; ſhe watched each wave,
As, capped with foam, it daſhed reſiſtleſs on,
And broke to atoms in a tumult wild
Of mingled foam and ſpray; when on the ſea,
Red, 'mid the lines of white, ſhe ſaw a light
Come moving in from the wild waſte without,
As though ſome barque was ſteered toward the light
That glimmered from their walls. Swift it came on,
And ſcarce the maid could warn her ſire and friends
To haſten to the ſpot, when the barque, borne
On the high top of a huge ſurging wave,
Daſhed on the ſounding rock. One man alone
Of all her crew was ſaved from death that night.

That man was your ſire, Thorkell; wounded, ſtunned,
And helpleſs, he was thrown within the reach
Of Leidolf and his friends, who reſcued him
From the fierce wave, that would have drawn him back
Into the angry ſea. They took him up,
Conveyed him to the tower, brought back the life
To his dead limbs, to his cold heart again.
And many anxious hours beſide his couch
Thorunna ſat, and watched him as he ſlept,
Or as he ſtruggled feebly for his life
In fever's burning graſp. But youth at laſt
Gained triumph o'er diſeaſe; his ſtrength came back,
And ſtill his gentle nurſe ſat by his ſide,
And cheered his weary hours. He did her wrong:
Won her young heart, deceived her, and then fled.
You are his ſon and hers. Her father died.
Uni, a wild ſea-rover, one dark night
Landed his crew upon the ſands, and took
From weak Thorunna her lone tower. Thy youth
Was paſſed upon the deck of his light barque.
When you grew older you rebelled 'gainſt him,
Seduced his ſailors from allegiance to him,
Slew him at night amid his helpleſs ſleep,
And brought your ſervice here unto Thorkell,
Although you knew not that he was your ſire."

While Thorveiga told this ſtrange hiſtory,
Narfi had ſtood with pallid cheeks, his hands
Clenched in his ſtrong emotion. "Is this true?"
He cried; "or have you conjured up the tale
But to deceive me? True, I ſlew Uni.
He ſtruck me on my cheek, called me baſtard;
I waited till the night, and then he died.
Thorkell my ſire! Ambition! now I ſee
The road by which to mount.
Thorveiga ſaid:
"Have you no thought of her who gave you birth?
Whether alive or dead?"
"Speak on!" he ſaid,
"And tell me all. Mother! the very word
Sounds ſtrangely to my ear; yet in my mind,
Dim, like a dream, comes back a gentle face
That ſmiled upon me once."
"That face was mine!"
The Sorcereſs exclaimed. "Yes, I am ſhe,
Thorunna, who once dwelt in that lone tower
Upon the ſea-ſhore; ſhe whom Thorkell wronged,
Who nurſed thy youth till madneſs drove her forth;
She who by madneſs gained the myſtic gift
Of prophecy. I have watched over you,
Known of each chance that time has ever brought,
But found, alas! that I was powerleſs

To aid you,—ſome ſtronger force controlled you.
Nor can I read *your* future. All is hid
From me beyond the preſent of your fate."
She held her thin, white hands outſtretched to him,
And Narfi trembled when thoſe hands touched his.

"Mother," he ſaid, "thy gift of prophecy
Deſcends to me. Thorkell has lived too long;
'T is time we were avenged —"
"'T is not by thee,
My ſon, ſhall Thorkell die. I know his fate;
The ſtars have told me how his end ſhall be.
The time approaches, but 't is not *thy* hand
Muſt cut his thread of life." But while ſhe ſpoke
The ſound of ſtruggling feet, the claſh of ſwords,
Was heard without the hut. Narfi ſtarted,
And raiſed the latch. Thorveiga called aloud:
"Stay, ſtay, my ſon; the future comes to me,
And dangers cluſter now around your head!"
But he ſtayed not, —ſprung through the opening door,
And left her. For a moment ſhe ſtood ſtill,
With eyes bent down, as though upon the earth
She read, in her own myſtic characters,
What time now wrote in the material type
Of act and deed without. Then to the door,

With a wild and pitiful cry, ſhe ſprung,
And ſtaggered o'er the threſhold, — the firſt time
In twenty years the ſunlight fell on her.

Kormak and Thorgils with the dawn ſet forth
To pay the promiſed viſit to the hut
Of the witch Thorveiga. The hills were paſſed;
They clambered up the deep ravine, and now
Drew near her deſolate and lone abode,
When Thorgils, who went firſt, felt a ſharp wound
Piercing his ſide, and heard the bowſtring's twang, —
Saw two huge figures leap adown the rock
Before him: drew his ſword, and ſlew Oddur
With his firſt blow. But now the heavens whirled round,
And in a dream he fell. With a wild cry
Kormak ruſhed on, as the giant Gudmund
Raiſed his right arm to ſlay the proſtrate youth,
And daſhed his ſword aſide. Now, o'er the form
Of Thorgils their ſwords met and rung again
In deſperate battle. As Gudmund fell
Never to riſe, down from Thorveiga's hut,
With deſperate purpoſe gleaming in his eyes,
His face ſtill pale, ruſhed Narfi, with ſword drawn,
And took the giant's place. "Now you or I,"
He ſaid, "fight our laſt fight!"

"Not all the lives
Of all the houſe of Thorkell will repay
My brother's death!" Kormak replied to him.
"You ſhall go firſt; the reſt ſhall follow you,
If that dear life be ſlain. You ſhall go firſt!
I feel the ſtrength of all my warrior ſires
Come to me now. Back, back to death you go!"
And Narfi's blood was flowing faſt; forced back,
He fell upon his knee, beheld the ſword
Of Kormak blazing in the air above,
Then ſaw no more of earth. Forth from her hut,
Her hair diſhevelled and her eyes on fire,
Thorveiga came, and raiſed her fallen ſon,
Tore off her robes to ſtanch his flowing blood,
But came too late to ſave; his head fell back
Upon her arm, and Narfi's ſoul had fled.
The Sorcereſs aroſe, ſtretched her thin hand
Toward the ſky, and called upon the gods
To ſmite his ſlayer. "Wherefore ſtrike ye not?
Odin, great Thor, Thorveiga calls on ye!
They heed me not. Then let him live!" ſhe cried;
"My curſe ſhall follow him: his life be ſhort,
But filled with pains and anguiſh; diſappoint
His deareſt hopes; cruſh every joy of life,
And make his path as deſolate and drear
As mine hath been; let his death be cruel,
Bloody, terrible. By every ſpell
Of magic art I call deſtruction down

On his doomed head! And in his lateſt hour
May I be there to curſe his paſſing ſoul,
As from the earth it flies!"
But Kormak kneeled
Beſide his brother, drew the arrow forth,
And ſtanched his blood; called back the life again
To his white lips and to his half-cloſed eyes,
Nor heard, nor heeded then, her fearful curſe.

Kormak.

CANTO VI.

THE MARRIAGE.

CANTO VI.

THE MARRIAGE.

WHILE by his brother's ſick-couch Kormak ſat,
And tended him gently as a ſiſter,
Forgetting other love, and e'en revenge,
Remembering only that deep, ſtrong love
That bound him to his brother; while his hand
Held to his fevered lips the cooling draught,
And ſmoothed his weary pillow, as he bent
O'er him while ſleeping, held in his the hand
That burned with pain and fever, — at Tunga,
Thorkell was brooding over what had chanced,
And dwelling on the future; and alone
He ſat, gloomy, within the deepening gloom
Of his own chamber, when Steingerda came
And knelt beſide his knee, and took his hand,
In ſilence watched his cloſe-contracted brow
And firm-ſet lips. At laſt ſhe ſpoke to him: —

"Father," she said, "give up your fiercer thought,
I pray of you; the anger that you nurse
Gnaws, like a vulture, deeply in your heart,
Writes suffering on your brow, helps the years
To bow your frame, works more than even time
On you. Forgive the wrong you bore of old;
Forgive his son of old who injured you.
'T is noble to forgive, — a braver part
Than, by opposing gods and men, to bring
Destruction on us all. Father, I love
Him whom you seek to kill, — destroying him,
You strike my heart as well: his heart is mine,
As mine is his, — my life with his is joined.
I pray you soften down your ancient hate,
Pardon the past, remember not old wrongs!"

While thus she pleaded, Thorkell's firm-set face
Relaxed not line nor muscle, and his eye
Turned on her face its unrelenting glance.
"Thou art no daughter of my blood," he said,
"If thou dost love my hated enemy,
The son of him who wronged both me and mine,
Thee, being mine, and all our kindred house,
And now himself hath slain my servants true,
And braved my anger with an idle boast,
And armed my prince in wrath against our house:
Is this the way to quench the old-time feud?

A fitting marriage this would be indeed!
Blood lies between you, a red, warning ſtream,
And you would dip your garments in the ſtain,
Would hold the hand whoſe kindred ſhed my blood,
Would ſwear to love where you ſhould give but hate!
Shame on you, daughter! you are none of mine;
Your mother muſt have wronged me. Say no more!
When you can ſtay the waves that waſh our ſhores,
And heap their maſſes up againſt the ſky;
When you can change the froſt to ſummer's heat,
Melt the vaſt iceberg with beſeeching eye;
When you can call the ſun down from above,
Blot out the moon, and dim the ſhining ſtars, —
Then may you hope to move me. Tears are vain;
Their feeble drops hiſs on my burning heart,
And feed its blazing fires. Away! away,
Before I curſe the child that loves my foes
Better than me or mine!" He ſhook her off,
And, trembling both with rage and paſſion, ſtood
A fearful image of unbridled rage.
Then with quick footſteps, nervous and infirm,
He paced the room.
And Steingerda replied:
"Curſe me not, father; do not curſe the child
Who loves thee now and ever. None the leſs

My love for thee, — who gave my life its life,
To whom my heart now clings as firm as clings
The ivy to the ſtrong, ſuſtaining oak,
Neſtling round its great trunk, — becauſe, alas!
Another love than thine muſt ſhare with thine.
I *gave* not love, but loved unwillingly,
Knowing thou call'ſt him foe: could not but love,
Deſpite myſelf and thee, and every thought
That bade my heart beat coldly; and my heart
Grew with my love, nor gave thee ſmaller place
Becauſe his place was there. Forgive, forget,
And curſe me not becauſe my heart ſpeaks out,
Confiding all to thee."

When the ſunſhine
Falls on the high ice-plain, cold and frigid
It caſts the bright reflection off, — melts not,
Yields not; as ſtony-hearted as that plain,
As coldly unrelenting, Thorkell heard,
But gave no word of anſwer, ſave to bid
Her leave him; and ſadly ſhe obeyed him.

Alone again with thought, he nurſed revenge,
Repeating to himſelf: "I will not change,
And baſely give my hand where I have ſworn
To give the ſword's edge; not though Odin ſend,
In his great thunder tones, divine commands,
And light his meſſenger with all the glare
Of the keen lightning! His power may cruſh me,

But it can never change: my ſoul at leaſt
Is all my own, nor gods nor men ſhall bend
Its earneſt purpoſe!"
'Mid his reverie
Came one to ſpeak with him; and there entered
A woman, dreſſed in black, with a maſked face
And ſtately air. The thin, pale hand, half hid
Amid the folds of her dark robe, was that
Which held the head of Narfi when the life
Flowed from his breaſt with the dark crimſon ſtream
That Kormak's ſword had freed. Long they ſat there
In conſultation, and when they parted
Thorkell ſaid: "Thou wilt not fail! Remember
His, the Venetian cup, and he muſt drink
Oblivion to the paſt."
She anſwered:
"He ſhall drink oblivion, and the wrongs
That time has gathered, unavenged, ſhall then
Find retribution. Doubt it not; bring thou
The nuptials ſpeedily, — I will not fail."

For the third time we viſit Tunga's halls
Amid feſtivity; for on this night
The daughter of the houſe ſhall wed its foe,
And bridge by her alliance the deep gulf
That long has yawned between. When Steingerda

Heard Thorkell bid to deck herſelf in robes
Meet for her wedding with the man ſhe loved,
While yet his bitter and paſſionate words
Of enmity were ringing in her ears,
She feared that rage had overpreſſed his brain,
And made him mad.

"My father, late you ſaid
I muſt not love him, for he was thy foe;
And now you bid me wed him! you are changed?

Thorkell replied: "I looked behind the veil,
And found thy marriage was a thing decreed.
I may not war with fate, for deſtiny
Laughs at man's feeble efforts, and ſweeps on
Its full, ſtrong tide, regardleſs of us all.
To-night you wed; to-night ſhall Kormak ceaſe
To bear my hate; too long, by far too long,
Has he been hated."

While ſhe heard his words,
She looked in vain for kindneſs in his eye
To match the gentler ſpeech, and to her heart
There came a ſad diſtruſt, a boding ſenſe
Of ſome calamity. More in ſorrow
Than in joy ſhe clad herſelf in gay robes,
And waited for her bridegroom; and at eve
He came, and Thorgils, with a cheek ſtill pale,
But with recovery beaming in his eye,
And many friends were with him. As ſhe ſaw

Her lover, felt the thrill when their hands met,
Read his love in every paſſionate glance
That paſſed between them, her ſad foreboding
Vaniſhed as night at ſunriſe, and dear thoughts,
Fair anticipations for the future,
Came to her heart, and baniſhed every fear.

And Thorkell gave them welcome in few words;
His mind ſeemed abſent, brooding on ſome thought;
And oft he ſtarted, and looked wildly round,
Then ſunk again in moodineſs; but when,
Each in his place in the great banquet-hall,
The hour had come to pledge his ancient foe
And call him ſon, the old man rouſed himſelf,
And bade the wine be poured; each cup was filled
With dancing, ſparkling drops. "My ſon," he ſaid,
And raiſed his cup, "the wrongs are now atoned
That long have warred between thy houſe and mine, —
I drink with thee — *Oblivion to the paſt.*"

And Kormak gazed on the fair face of her
Whom now he wedded, raiſed the cryſtal bowl,
And drank the ſparkling wine; each cup was drained.

While empty goblets clattered on the board,
Roſe the long ſhout of "Kormak and his bride!"
"Live, Kormak and his bride!" Thorkell ſpoke not,
But gazed, like one entranced, on him who now
Claimed kindred with his houſe.
As the cry ceaſed,
A dark-robed form, that ſtood within a niche
Concealed by drooping foldings of a flag
That ſwept from ceiling to the oaken floor, —
The tattered banner of an old ſea-king, —
Came wildly through their midſt, threw back her hood,
And bared her pallid face, o'er which there fell,
In tangled maſſes and in elfin locks,
Her long gray hair; and every breath was huſhed,
And every heart beat ſlower, as ſhe poured
A cup of wine, and raiſed it to her lips.

"Thorveiga drinks your pledge," ſhe cried aloud;
"Thorkell, remembereſt thou the wronged maid
Of the lone tower upon the ocean cliff?
Thorunna comes again to drink with thee
Thy lateſt pledge, 'Oblivion to the paſt.'
Kormak, I drink to thee; my ſon you ſlew,
But here I pledge 'Oblivion to the paſt.'
Why ſtand ye awed? I drink to all of ye.

What! feel ye yet the poiſon in your veins?
Works the drugged wine on ye ſo ſoon, ſo ſoon?"

And every face grew pale, the blood froze chill
In each cold heart, as, with her arms upraiſed
And burning eyes, the Sorcereſs ſpoke on:
"Thorkell, you bade me poiſon but one cup:
Lo, I have poiſoned all! Ye all have drunk,
And I with you, the fatal pledge of death!
Now pales the blood in warrior cheeks, and now
Chills round your boaſtful hearts the ice of death!
Your keen-edged ſwords, your ſhining ſuits of mail,
Avail not now, — the foe has paſſed within.
No power can ſave ye; with a gallant train
Thorveiga marches to the world beyond,
And wronged Thorunna takes at laſt revenge."

Thorkell had ſtarted when Thorunna's name
Firſt paſſed her lips; for with that name there ruſhed
A flood of recollection back to him,
And in her fearful, pallid face he traced
The wreck of beauty that was hers of old;
Her fair young face came back before his eye,
The while its ghoſtly, dread reality
Mocked at his recollection, with the change
That years and wrongs had written on her brow;

And the old wrong roſe up before his mind,
And, while the poiſon thickened in his veins
And froze his heart, his conſcience froze his ſoul.

The deadly poiſon mingled with the wine
Preyed inſtant on each life. Scarce time had they
To bid a laſt farewell to friends around,
Ere the fell ſickneſs cruſhed the germ of life,
And Death transfixed them with his fatal ſpear.
One kiſs, one laſt embrace, and, hand in hand,
The wedded lovers ſought their bridal bed
In the cold halls of death; and Thorgils kneeled,
Kiſſing his brother's lips, and kiſſing died;
And many fled from out the fatal hall,
But in their flight they died. Not one of thoſe
Who drank that pledge, but drank the draught
of death.

And years rolled on: in Tunga's ancient hall
There dwelt no inmate; for the walls were curſed,
And gliding ghoſts were ſeen at midnight hour;
And, as the wind a moment huſhed its ſweep
Round thoſe dread walls, within the goblins
ſhrieked,
And drank again — "Oblivion to the paſt!"

THE END.

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